



VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

1894 - 1930

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VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY

1894-1930

**Essays in Commemoration of the Tenth Anniversary
of the Death of Vladimir Mayakovsky**

— by —

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Isidor Schneider**

Translations of Poems by Mayakovsky

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Scene from THE BATH

HOW ONE WRITES A POEM

by

Vladimir Mayakovsky

I must explain my title. In the course of literary discussions and conversations with young workers about verbal assonances ('soap,' 'rope,' 'Pope,' and so on) and in writing criticism it has often fallen to my lot to attack the ancient art of poetry. It is not that I have anything against ancient poetry, which is innocent of all evil. I attacked it only because the zealous defenders of what is old-fashioned used to shield themselves against new art by hiding behind the monuments of great men. The point was that by knocking down these monuments I made readers see a completely obscured and ignored aspect of these great men.

My chief and abiding hatred goes out against the romantico-critical, petty-bourgeois spirit, against those good gentlemen for whom the grandeur of ancient poetry consists of the fact that they, too, have loved as Pushkin's Onegin loved Tatiana. They surround an important, serious work of poetry with an atmosphere of sexual thrills and swoons. Their taste is based on the belief that only eternal poetry is above all dialectic and that the creative process merely consists in throwing one's hair back with inspiration and waiting until celestial poetry descends on one's bared head in the form of a pigeon, a peacock or an ostrich.

It is not difficult to confute these gentlemen. One need only compare Tatiana's love and the 'art that Ovid sung' with the projected marriage law, to read to Donets miners the story of the coxcomb who was made a cuckold, or to rush to the aid of May Day parades shouting 'My uncle has very honest principles' these words being drawn from the beginning of Pushkin's story of Onegin. After such an experiment it is

doubtful whether a young man who is burning with desire to devote his powers to the Revolution will still want to occupy himself seriously with the antiquarian element in poetry. Still, skeptical phrases rise. 'You only destroy; you do not create' 'The old manuals are bad, but where are the new ones?' 'Give us the rules of your poetic art, give us manuals.'

Therefore I am going to write about my calling as a practitioner, not as a theorist. Once more I warn the reader categorically that I am not laying down rules that will enable any one to become a poet and write verse. A poet is a man who creates poetic rules. For the hundredth time I shall resort to a comparison that I am reluctant to employ.

A mathematician is a man who creates, develops, and perfects mathematical laws. He is a man who brings something new to mathematical science. The man who first stated that two and two make four was a great mathematician even if he got this result by adding two pebbles to two other pebbles. All other men, even those who add incomparably greater things, locomotives, for instance, are not mathematicians at all. What I am saying does not detract from the value of the work performed by the man who adds locomotives. When transportation gets disorganized this work may be a hundred times more precious than pure mathematics, but it is not necessary to demand that that task be put on a level with the geometry of Lobachevski.

Eighty out of a hundred rhymed imbecilities that the editors of our magazines publish are brought out simply because magazine editors only know enough to think, 'I like that' or 'I don't like that.' They forget that taste is a faculty that one can and must develop. Almost all magazine editors have complained to me that when manuscripts of poems arrive they do not know why they reject them. A really literary editor should be able to say to the poet, 'Your verses are very regular. They are composed in accordance with the third edition of Brodovski's versification

manual. All your rhymes are well tested and have long been found in N. Abramov's Complete Dictionary of Russian Rhymes. Since I do not have any good verse now I shall accept them and pay for them as I pay for the work of any trained copyist, that is to say, thirty rubles per printed page.'

Either the poet will stop writing or he will begin to consider verse as something that demands a great deal of work. In any case, he will stop putting on airs in front of a reporter who does real work and who is paid so much per line for what he writes even if it is not printed.

In order to raise the level of poetry, in order to contribute to the future development of art, we must stop considering poetry independently of other forms of human activity. Life creates the situations that must be expressed and for which rules must be invented. The form of expression and the purpose of the rules are determined by the social class, by the exigencies of our struggle. For instance, the revolution has given the rude language of the masses the right to circulate anywhere; the popular language of the working-class districts is moulded by the broad streets on which it is spoken. But the weak, slender language of intellectuals, with its overworked expressions: 'ideal' 'the elements of justice,' 'the divine principle,' 'the transcendental face of Christ and the Antichrist' -- all these phrases that are murmured in chic restaurants have worn thin. Language is being carried away by a new torrent. How can it be made poetic? The old rules with all their dreams, roses, and Alexandrines do not fit any more. How can current speech be introduced into poetry, how can poetry be extracted from current conversation? Must we spit on the revolution in the name of iambic verse? Certainly not.

II

Let us therefore give the keys of the city to this new language. Let shouts take the place of re-

frains. Let drumbeats take the place of lullabies.

In 1820 Gretch did not know the chastuchki (Russian popular songs) and even if he had known them he would have spoken of them as he did of popular poetry, disdainfully: 'These verses have no rhythm, no assonance.' But 'these verses' were adopted by the Petersburg streets, and when our gentlemen critics have leisure they will be able to discover what rules were used in composing them. Novelty is obligatory in a work of poetry. The verbal matter that offers itself to the poet must be transformed by his labor. If one uses old verbal scrap iron to make a poem one must take care that a definite proportion of new material is added. It is the quality and quantity of this new material that determine the value of the mixture.

Of course, novelty does not mean that one keeps producing unheard-of truths. New forms of iambic verse, free verse, alliteration, and assonance are not created every day. One can try to develop them, to expand them, and make them penetrate the public. 'Two and two make four' has no life of its own. One must apply this truth (rules of addition). One must also make this truth easy to remember (more rules). One must clearly reveal the character of this truth through a whole series of visual representations (examples, subjects).

It is clear from what I have said that poetry does not consist in describing and representing bare facts. Of course, there is need for this kind of work but it is on a par with the minutes that a secretary takes at a meeting.

Poetry begins with tendency. To my mind, Lermontov's poem, 'I go alone on the road,' is a kind of propaganda to encourage girls to go walking with poets. If one could only write a poem as forceful as Lermontov's, persuading people to join cooperatives.

The old manuals of poetic art are of no use.

Such books should not be called, How to Write, but How People Wrote. Let me be honest. I know nothing about iambics or trochees. I have never been able to distinguish them and never shall be able to. Not that it is difficult, but I have never had to concern myself with such things in my poetic work. Several times I have attempted to study these matters. I have succeeded in understanding the mechanism of regular verse and have then promptly forgotten it. But these trifles, which occupy ninety per cent of our manuals of poetry, do not occupy three per cent of my own practical activity.

In poetic work there exist only certain general rules for getting one's work under way, and even those rules are purely conventional. As in chess, the opening moves are almost always the same, but after you have played them once you try to find others. The most brilliant coup cannot be repeated in a given situation a second time. For one's adversary can be defeated only by unexpected attacks. The same thing is true of unexpected rhymes in poetry.

III

What, then, are the necessary conditions for getting one's poetic work started?

1. The existence of a social task that can be accomplished only through poetic work. There must be a social 'command.'
2. You must have an exact knowledge of or at least a feeling for the aspirations of the class or group you represent.
3. You must have the material, the words. The storehouse, the reserves of your mind, should be equipped with the necessary words--expressive, rare, new, renovated, and invented words of every kind.
4. Means of production are necessary. These include a pen, a pencil, a typewriter, a telephone, clothes to wear when going out for food, a bicycle to ride on to the editorial office, a table, an umbrella to enable one to write in the rain, a room in which one can take

a certain number of steps (this is necessary for one's work), connections with a clipping bureau in order to make sure of receiving a continual supply of material on subjects that are of interest to your district.

5. One must have formed the habit of elaborating words. This habit is infinitely individual and comes only after years of daily work. It covers rhymes, measures, alliterations, images, gradations, style, pathos, titles, plans, and so on.

For instance, the social task is to find the words for a song to be sung by the Red Guards, who are going to defend Petersburg. The purpose is to defeat Yudenich. The material is words, drawn from the common speech of soldiers. The tool is a pencil point. The form, a rhymed chastuchka. Here is the result:--

Milkoi mne v podarok burka
I noski podareni
Mchit Yudenich s Peterburga
Kak naskipidareni.

(My girl friend made me a present
Of a jacket and some socks.
Yudenich is fleeing from Petersburg
As if he were soaked in turpentine.)

The novelty of the quatrain that justifies the production of this particular chastuchka rests in the rhyme, 'noski podareni' and 'naskipidareni.' This novelty makes the thing necessary, poetic. For the chastuchka to attain maximum effectiveness the rhyme must be unexpected and the first two lines must have no relation to the other two. Moreover, the first two lines can be regarded as purely accessory. To any man who wants to evaluate and qualify poetic work these very general rules will open up more possibilities than the rules that now exist. It is enough to consider as coefficients the elements of material equipment and form. Is there a social command? Yes. Two points. A purpose? Two points. Is it rhymed? One more point. Are there alliterations? Half a point.

Then one point for the rhyme because one had to take a bus to arrive at this unaccustomed measure.

To qualify a poem is equally easy. The verses of Demyan Bedny correspond to an urgent, well-understood social command. Their purpose is clear. They are adapted to the needs of workers and peasants. The words are those of the daily life of the semi-peasant class, mixed with remnants of poetic rhymes.

The verses of Kruchonykh, with their alliterations, dissonances, and purpose, are destined to aid future poets. I shall not occupy myself here with the metaphysical problem of discovering which is the better -- a poem of Demyan Bedny or a poem by Kruchonykh. They are made up of different elements that belong on different planes and each can exist without embarrassing the other or competing against it. For my part, I believe that the best poetic work will be written in accordance with the social command laid down by the Communist International and that it will tend to assure the victory of the proletariat. It will be written in new, striking words comprehensible to everybody. It will be born in the hour when it is wanted and will be sent to the editor by airplane express.

Of course, the process of evaluating poetry is really something much more complex and subtle than I have indicated here. I am simplifying, enlarging, exaggerating my thought intentionally. I simplify to show more clearly that the essence of this study of literature does not reside in individual appreciation of any particular piece of writing but rather in a fair way of approaching the study of the process of literary production.

IV

How, then, is a poem written? Work begins long before the social command has been received, all unknown to one's consciousness. Preparatory poetic work continues uninterruptedly. One can write a piece

of poetry within a given time only if one has previously accumulated considerable poetic reserves. For instance,--and I am merely mentioning what comes to my mind at the moment, -- a good family name, Glitzeron. It came by chance during some conversation about glycerin. I shall always remember a passage taken from some American song that needs to be Russified and that gives me infinite pleasure:--

Hard-hearted Hannah
The vamp of Savannah?
The vamp of Savannah?
G.A.

I also have in my storehouse of alliterations one that was suggested to me by an advertisement that I happened to see out of the corner of my eye and that bore the name, 'Nita Jo':--

Gde jiviot Nita Jo
Nita niji etajom.

(Where lives Nita Jo?
On the floor below.)

I also can choose between various subjects, some clear, some confused. First, rain in New York. Secondly, the prostitute on the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris. It is said to be particularly chic to make love to her because she has only one leg. Thirdly, the old porter in the wash room of the huge Heissler restaurant in Berlin. Fourthly, the immense subject of the October Revolution, which is something that one cannot imagine if one did not live in a village.

All these reserves exist in my mind. All my time has been spent accumulating them -- eighteen to twenty hours a day. I am almost always murmuring something. It is this concentrated effort that accounts for the supposed distraction of the poet. I pursue this work of accumulation so intensely that eight times out of ten I can recall the place and particular circumstances in which during fifteen years

of work certain rhymes, certain alliterations, certain images came to me and received their definite form.

The notebook is an essential. Ordinarily one does not learn of the existence of the notebook until after the death of the writer. But for the writer the notebook is everything.

Beginners in poetry do not possess such a notebook, for they have no practice, no experience. Rarely does one find in their work really finished verses, and that is why their poems are so long-drawn-out. It is only with the aid of reserves that have been carefully worked over that I have been able to do a thing by a given date.

About 1913, as I was coming back from Saratov to Moscow in the company of a certain young lady, I told her, in order to prove my complete loyalty to her, that I was 'not a man but a cloud in pants'. At once I realized that this expression might serve in a poem and I was afraid that she would repeat it and prevent my turning it to profit. In great anxiety I questioned the girl for half an hour, asking her insidious questions, and I only became calm when I was convinced that my words had gone in one ear and out the other. Two years later I used the 'cloud in pants' as the title of a poem.

Here is another example. For two days I meditated on the best way to express the tenderness a solitary man feels for a woman he loves above all else. How would he care for her, how would he love her? The third night I went to bed with a headache, not having discovered anything. But in the middle of the night it finally came to me:--

I shall guard and I shall love
your body
as a soldier
mutilated by war
--of no use to anybody--

guards
his remaining leg.

I jumped up half awake. In the darkness I wrote down on a cigarette box with the blackened end of a match the words 'one leg' and fell asleep again. The next morning I spent two hours trying to remember what leg it was and how the words happened to be written on the box.

Here is an advertisement from the Kharkov Proletarian: 'How to be a writer. Detailed reply for fifty kopeks in postage stamps. Slaviansk Station, Donets Line, Post-Office Box 11.' What do you think of that? Simply a survival of the old regime, and already the magazine Distraction is giving away as a supplement a book entitled How to Be a Poet in Five Lessons. I think that my little examples are enough to prove that poetry belongs to the category of the most difficult things in the world, the category of reality. A poem must be considered in the same way in which this immortal quatrain of Pasternak's considers a woman:--

From that day, from your head to your feet,
I carried you with me and knew you by heart
As a provincial actor knows a play of Shakespeare's.
I took you about with me in the city and repeated you.

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of the publishers.

MAYAKOVSKY, POET OF THE REVOLUTION

by
Isidor Schneider

The life and work of Mayakovsky have aroused increasing curiosity and interest among poets outside his own country. This is due not only to the growing awareness of his status as one of the great poets of the twentieth century, but to the fact that his life and work can illuminate certain special literary aspects of the period.

Literature, perhaps more quickly than any of the other arts, reflects social change. It is no accident that so many writers have turned from the individual against society theme to the theme of man in society; that the new conventions aim at simplification and broader and more direct communication with people; and that on the part of the writer a radically new sense of status and responsibility is gaining acceptance.

Certain literary principles, which a succession of critics, beginning with Poe, have labored to establish and which ten years ago seemed to be securely enough established -- the autonomy of art and the artist, and pleasure-giving as a major function of art, are today insecure, minority concepts. Responsibility to one's own artistic conscience, formerly the sole care of the artist, is sharing place today with an as yet unclearly defined responsibility to society. How to serve society, more than the pursuit of artistic perfection, is today motivating the majority of serious writers. Correlatively, the analysis of the relations of a piece of writing with the society in which it occurs has become a major function of criticism as important, or more important, than a judgment of its absolute artistic status.

Since one of the chief sources of change in our time, both immediate and by influence, has been the Russian Revolution; and since the new literary problems reached their most crucial forms and some proposed solutions their most direct application in the Soviet Union, a consideration of the life and work of the poet most identified with the Russian Revolution and the establishment of the new socialist society should be of interest to students of literature.

Vladimir Mayakovsky was the son of a forester whose early death left the family destitute. This should be borne in mind, for there can be no doubt that early suffering and struggle had much to do with the rebellion that, though it shifted from defiance now of literary and now of political institutions, assumed the necessity of shattering the institutions that existed.

Mayakovsky was scarcely in his teens when he was arrested for carrying on revolutionary propaganda. But the generation that witnessed 1905 matured early. I cannot agree with my co-contributor, Mr. Kaun, that Mayakovsky's earlier revolutionary activities were only skin deep, and that upon his release from prison he plunged happily into the literary Bohemia of Russia as if the more thoroughly to shake off his brief revolutionary past. In the post-1905 reaction a professional revolutionary had to go underground; but a revolutionary writer could continue to function in Bohemia making oblique attacks upon the rulers. Probably, if the period of stability of the post-1905 reaction and the brief good times that followed had lasted, Mayakovsky's revolutionary interests would have withered, lacking occasions to engage them. But the occasions came and Mayakovsky showed in his life and work that the period between 1908 and 1917 was a hiatus, not a break.

There is evidence of his continued revolutionary feeling in the poetry of that period and in his personal letters. And the nature of his work and

the contents of his mind that it reveals can only presuppose a continuity of interest in the revolutionary movement. It was long-gathered knowledge as well as intuition that enabled him, in his remarkable occasional poems, to respond so intelligently as well as so feelingly to the episodes and turns of the eventful and dynamic years of the developing Soviet society.

His long poem, "A Cloud in Pants," published in 1915 predicted the revolution, even setting a date, 1916. His poems of the war years were revolutionary in their opposition to the war and their calls for the defeat of Tsarism. In all these poems, and more directly in the poem "Man," published in 1916, there was the revolutionary humanism which he shared with Gorki. For man's cleverness and courage he had an unending admiration. "In his brainbox sparkles a priceless wit and under the wool of his vest beats a wonderful little lump -- his heart." This humanism is based more on man's future than on his past, more on his potentialities than on his achievements. In many of his pre-revolutionary poems Mayakovsky presented outright or implicit contrasts of the degradation he saw in the old society that constricted, thwarted, impoverished and humiliated men with a new social system where man's self-fulfilment would be possible. In the new society Mayakovsky foretold "will then be born men --real men!" Thus Mayakovsky reflected the faith which led the Russian revolutionists to take risks and make sacrifices.

Even Bohemianism itself is a complex mixture of realities. At one time too much emphasis was placed on its liberties and defiances of convention. More recently too much emphasis has been placed on the decadence. There have always been both in this half-seceded section of capitalist society; in a crisis the two separate out, and become visible in their differences.

Whatever exhibitionism there may have been in Mayakovsky's slaps at the bourgeoisie there was cer-

tainly energy, and the energy was supplied by the sincerity of his detestation of the bourgeoisie. The manifesto issued by his Futurist group in 1912 was entitled "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste," which in that year meant bourgeois taste. His anger and scorn toward the bourgeoisie then was genuine: as genuine was his rapturous greeting of the revolution.

An established writer may accept drastic social change but his own adjustments to it are usually compulsive, reluctantly attempted and clumsily made. Mayakovsky was the rare case of a celebrated writer whose adjustment to a new society was successful to the point of complete identification with it. For this Mayakovsky had exceptional and unusual qualifications including even the physical advantages of a commandingly tall stature and a voice of great reach and range facilitating his use of poetry, through recitation, as an instrument of revolutionary agitation. Before there were sound amplifiers he had been able to hold audiences of thousands in vast auditoria and at bivouacs at the Civil War fronts.

More decisive of course were the qualifications of heart and mind. He had the revolutionist's enterprise, courage and confidence. As others took risks with their lives he took risks with his talent. He was not afraid of soiling, of corrupting it. From the outset of the revolution, he became a revolutionary propagandist; he took on assignments from Rosta, the official Telegraphic Agency. At his suggestion, empty store windows in the big cities were used for posters. Mayakovsky was also talented in drawing and he wrote propaganda rhymes to his own bold caricatures. He felt this work to be revolutionary action. A diary note of that period reads: "All kinds of Denikins are advancing.....I have made three thousand posters and about six thousand inscriptions to them."

The themes of these famous "Rosta Windows" ranged from reports from the front, to appeals to the people to economize fuel, and exhortations to cleanli-

ness, to discipline. They were among those early Soviet posters that hold a secure place in art. They contributed much to sustain the morale which enabled the young state to survive an incredible tally of dangers.

The last "Rosta Window" appeared in February, 1922. In March of the same year appeared Mayakovsky's first newspaper poem, his satire, "Lost in Conference" which won an approving comment from Lenin. From then on newspaper editors knew that they could call on Mayakovsky for pungent comment in verse on any matter of immediate interest.

Topical poetry is notoriously ephemeral. But Mayakovsky's topical verses, in their stirring energy and in their aptness, which came from great depth of experience, feeling and knowledge, rank with his best poetry. In those years, too, as the developing Soviet industries required couplets for advertising wrappers, Mayakovsky supplied them. With such services of the pen, performed without hesitation and at a top level of artistic effectiveness, Mayakovsky succeeded in making poetry action, in becoming a full participant in the revolution and the creation of the socialist society.

All this was done purposefully and as part of his artistic program. In his interesting essay, "How One Writes a Poem," Mayakovsky places first among the necessary conditions for getting started "the existence of a social task that can only be accomplished through poetic work. There must be a social command."

Two things are important to note here, one, the confident assumption of a place in the workrooms of society that indisputably belongs to the poet, a confidence not shared by poets in other countries; secondly, that the poet should listen for the "social command," in other words, that "inspiration" comes from contacts with the rest of the community and a knowledge of its needs and not out of the private

mind. The writer who has become part of the people will best be able to hear the "social command."

The command, of course, differs in different societies. In a stagnant and suffering society the "social command" may be for narcotic entertainment and go unheeded by serious writers who will listen instead to dissident voices or inward voices, as many of the great writers of recent generations in Europe or America have done. For Mayakovsky the social command came from a society in creative motion, constructing a new social and economic system and a new culture. Moving with that society he was able to carry out its "command."

Mayakovsky places a great importance on words as the sheer material of the working poet -- "expressive, rare, new, renovated and invented words." Verbal innovation has been a practise of "new" poets in all times and under almost all labels. But with Mayakovsky we see that it is not novelty for its own sake, as was the case with other of the Futurists with whom he began his career. It was a matter of finding new words for new ideas, a search that characterized Mayakovsky's work from the beginning. Even before the revolution, he wrote "Every period of life has its special vocabulary. The fight for new words in Russia is provoked by life. The nervous life of the town that has evolved in Russia demands swift words, sparing and abrupt; and in the arsenal of Russian literature there is only one language, a kind of country gentleman style."

Like other great innovators in poetry Mayakovsky found his richest source of new words in the language of the people. It was in the language of the social command that Mayakovsky made his response.

The same good criterion of use governed his other innovations. Written for recitation, his step-like lines indicate the most effective pauses and progressions; his puns and free rhyming provide holds for

the auditor; in short, they are good practical devices.

The emotional range in Mayakovsky is broad; and the expression is sweeping. There is something large, something vigorous and unrestrained in every thing from his pen. Sometimes the sweep goes beyond credibility and this fault is the most frequent in his poetry. But it is there also that we find his major virtue.

If, however, we look for a characteristic note in Mayakovsky's poetry, the satirical note must be our choice. Satire, a full-blooded, loving and hating satire, not the thin irony of the "superior mind" observing inferior minds, characterizes his work.

As I have noted above, when the "Rosta Windows" with their satires against landowners, capitalists, white guard generals, and interventionists were finished and Mayakovsky began writing topical verses for newspapers his first poem was a satire, "Lost in Conference," in which he made Homeric fun of the functionaries who were too busy conferencing ever to do any work.

In the new society there was also plenty of occasion for satire, as there was for praise and social gratulation. There were the lazy, the over-zealous and above all the bureaucrats. In these satirical poems Mayakovsky was in his element. He loved writing them. As he himself said, "I have a great itch for writing satiric things, for the feuilleton in verse can whip some bureaucrats so well that for a whole year their red flesh will shine through the seats of their trousers."

He referred to it again in his magnificent unfinished poem, "At the Top of my Voice." There it was "wit's cavalry."

"The favorite arm of all our fighting line,
wit's cavalry
wait tense and low
raising the sharpened lances of their rhyme
ready to burst in thunder on their foe"

And well Mayakovsky rode in this cavalry. A strong elation sounds in his satire. We feel him most adept, most at home on this ground.

In the poems Mayakovsky wrote on his travels in Europe and America the satirical note is strong, but it is accompanied - since in these lands he writes as a spectator -- with the indignation of one who witnesses injustices, and with pity for the sufferers.

It is hard, in a short essay, to do more than suggest the abundant energy and comprehensive interests of Mayakovsky. To use his own phrases this poet heard the "social command" and responded "at the top of his voice." Doing so he gave an expression to the reality of his place and time that will never be excluded from the world's enduring poetry.



Sketch of costumes for MYSTERY-BOUFFE made by Mayakovsky
"The Seven Pair of Clean Ones"

VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY
1894-1930

by
Alexander Kaun

I

Vladimir Mayakovsky was the poet of revolutionary Russia, in the same way as Vladimir Lenin was its organizer and leader. He personified and expressed the new order --- a husky sevenfooter striding the length and breadth of the earth, his thunderous bass roaring staccatoes unheard of in form and of shocking content. In lyric and epic in satire and epigram, in drama on stage and screen, in poster and placard and marching song, in print and from the platform -- Mayakovsky gave voice to the issues and events of Soviet Russia's formative years. About nine-tenths of his voluminous output reflect phases of Russian reality after October, 1917, from the uprising itself through the civil wars, intervention and blockade, the "breathing spell" interlude of the NEP, and into the constructive years of the first Five-Year Plan. Mayakovsky's pen and bass performed a double service: they glorified the achievements of the revolution, they sang the courage of the masses, the red soldiers and sailors, the Young Communists, the might of the collective "Ivan," the greatness and simplicity of Lenin. At the same time Mayakovsky brandished his weapons to condemn and satirize the enemies of the revolution, the external as well as the lurking inner enemies -- stupidity, ignorance, selfishness, pettiness, vulgarity, bureaucratic red tape, and other survivals of the old. While his work suffers from occasional unevenness, raucous exaggeration, slipshod wording and structure, in a word, journalese carelessness, it attains on the whole the goal of lending the revolution a distinct style. In popularity, he may have been eclipsed by such a clear and colloquial poet as Demyan Bedny,

but aside from his subject-matter, Demyan Bedny's verse might belong to any pre-revolutionary period since Ivan Krylov. Mayakovsky's contribution was precisely a revolutionary style. He had the satisfaction of feeling that this contribution would not end with his early death, for even in his lifetime his style found able followers and continuers. In Aseyev, Selvinsky, Bezymensky, and others, the Mayakovsky chord vibrates, with variations, to this day.

There was an apparent paradox in the fact that Mayakovsky, the best known representative of Futurist poetry, was acclaimed as the well-nigh official poet of the proletarian revolution. Futurist art, of all branches and shades, reflected the morbid and moribund aspects of bourgeois society, the sense of fatigue and satiety, of disgust with the past and present, and the desire to escape into some vague and outlandish "futurity." In the destructive part of their program the Russian Futurists followed their parent, Marinetti and his Italo-French group of iconoclasts, enemies of traditions and museums, of grammar and authority. But whereas Marinetti's worship of speed and the machine brought him and his adherents into the arms of militarism, imperialism, and fascism, their Russian counterpart embraced the Soviet regime from its very outset. It is dialectically plausible for the offspring of a social order to turn against its begetter. Ridiculed and despised by the society which they represented and hated at the same time, the Russian Futurists greeted the Bolshevik Revolution as a complete divorce from the past. On the other hand, the Bolshevik government, isolated and ostracised from within and without, could ill afford to reject the only group of creative artists who promptly offered their support. Thus it came about that during the first years of the Soviet order, Futurist painters, sculptors, architects, stage designers and directors, theorists and poets received official sanction and aid.

This odd marriage, in some respects a mar-

riage of convenience, did not last long. The rank and file of the proletariat, and also most of its leaders, notably Lenin, could not stomach the Futurist fare, though they suffered it as one of the extraordinary features of war and revolution. After the storm and stress of civil war, intervention, famine, epidemics and internal revolts, when life under the New Economic Policy began to assume a more normal aspect, the public expressed a demand for normal, understandable art. A gradual revulsion against "formalism," preoccupation with form at the expense of content, manifested itself in Party circles, and it grew in intensity as conditions of peaceful reconstruction permitted a closer attention to cultural matters. Futurism, and its derivatives and variants, proved ephemeral, once deprived of official backing. The movement lingered on for another decade, changing names and platforms, until it vanished under the mass onslaught against Formalism in music (Shostakovich) and in other arts. Needless to state, those artists who had something to say have gone on creating as individuals, with no regard for group labels.

The name of Vladimir Mayakovsky is inseparably linked with Russian Futurism, even though his place in the movement was unique all the time. As in the case of other creative artists, his theory and practice did not always coincide, and likewise, his poetic output far excelled his theoretical statements in originality and permanent value. Accordingly, Mayakovsky's poetry will concern us in a much larger measure than his Futuristic creed, or creeds. To be sure, he took this creed seriously. He was one of the four signers (with D. Burliuk, A. Kruchonykh, and V. Khlebnikov) of the Cubo-Futurists' declaration "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste," back in 1912. As one of this Moscow group he fought both against the tyranny of the old, from Pushkin to Bryusov, and against the St. Petersburg Ego-Futurists, represented by the saccharine vulgarizer of the new current, Igor Severyanin. The Muscovites displayed native robustness and authenticity, as against the mincing mannerisms and cheap xenophilia of

their brethren from the northern capital. It should be noted that when Marinetti gave a public address in Moscow, in February, 1914, Mayakovsky had the audacity to heckle and hiss this founder and high-priest of the movement, whose essential philistinism he scented through the perfumed film of his revolutionary phrases.

To put it briefly, Russian Futurism voiced a reaction against the various shades of Realism and Symbolism which dominated art and poetry, in particular on the eve of the war. In so far as it presented a revolt against stagnant tradition and hackneyed form, the current was healthful enough. Discounting the exaggerations and sensationalism of their manifestoes and verses as the extremism of a new school bent on shocking the respectable, we must not fail to credit the Futurists with some definite contributions. Their savage ridicule of the old proved successful to a certain degree in discouraging the endless repetition of threadbare themes in shopworn forms. Their positive contribution was largely linguistic, in having broadened the medium of poetic expression by means of modifying old words, coining new ones, and employing zaumny language. They applied the word zaumny -- "beyond sense," "irrational" -- to the use of words not for their meaning (they are often quite meaningless), but for the sake of invoking a certain picture of emotion. Thus, a rhythmic conglomeration of sounds might onomatopoeetically suggest an oriental city, or the Ukrainian speech, or Russian.¹ Some of these eccentrics reached the limits of absurdity in their efforts to set the word free from meaning, with rather dubious results even as to sound effects (Kruchonykh, for example).

1. A few examples. Here is Anton Lotov's "Melody of an Eastern City:"

Khan Khan da dash	Vaks bar dan yak
shu shur i des	Zaza
Vilar' yagda	Siu sech bazd i
Suksan kardeksh	Gar yo zda be
Mak sa Mak sa	Men khatt zayde
Yakim den zar	Vin da chok me

Velemir Khlebnikov, on the other hand, had an intimate knowledge of the Russian language, an inborn feeling for words and their architectonics, and a natural penchant for philological adventures. In his most daring innovations and nonsense-verses he betrayed these qualities that placed him above other Futurists, most of whom depended on whim and intuition when taking liberties with grammar and speech. Back in 1910, he became famous by a poem, in which the word *smyekh*, "laughter," was used in an endless variety of derivatives, most of them fantastic but all marked with an authentic sound true to the flexibility of Russian words attained through prefixes and suffixes.²

What distinguished Mayakovsky from his fellow Futurists was the element of robust sense which he displayed even in his outlandish stunts. This was evidenced in his poetry more than in his theorizing passages, where he sounded as blatantly far-fetched and insolent as in his early public appearances, flaunting his notorious yellow waist. ("Tis good to hide your

And here is Vasilisk Gnyedov's suggestion of the Ukrainian tongue:

Hriba budik tsiri chipich-	Hulya laskav stohma
Zduina na khan dyaki,	rehota tsvirka
Koli za hich budin tsikavche	Svitina zzila, sankeh.
Taras Shevchenko budyache	Baydry shliha
skavche-	shkapik ruko
	Da d'hoti sila khmara

A ya z zirok poiv oparu

The extremist Alexander Kruchonykh opined that in his following "quintain there is more of the national Russian than in all the poetry of Pushkin:"

dir, bull, shchil,
ubeshchur
skum
vi so bu
r l ez

². The dancing hilarity of Khlebnikov's poem cannot be transmitted in another tongue. Still I have attempted

soul from inspection by wrapping it in a woman's yellow waist.") Yet one should note that even in this connection he showed on occasion keen judgment and a perspicacity that was almost prophetic. I have in mind his paper, "A Drop of Tar" (the Russian saying: "A drop of tar in a barrel of honey" is akin to the English "A fly in the ointment"), published in December, 1915, as an imaginary funeral oration over the alleged corpse of Futurism. Here he foreshadows the change of Futurism from the precious shriek of a handful of solipsists into the clarion call of a great revolution. You feel in this dirge both the spirit of the war that was raging at the moment, and a portent of the oncoming revolution. He chides the "traditional" critics and the middle-aged readers ("the young men, to whom we are endeared, will not be back from the battlefield for some time yet") for jeering at the corpse: "Gentlemen, aren't you really sorry for this giddy red-tufted chap who was not so clever and a bit boorish, but always, Oh always daring and ardent?" But then he admits that he himself is not so sorry for the deceased, "for different reasons, to be sure." He asks them to recall the "first gala appearance of Russian Futurism, signalized by such a ringing 'slap in the face of public taste'," with its three memorable blows: against all canons that "reduce inspiration to ice," against

an approximate version, keeping the original meter and rhythm:

Oh laugh forth, laugh laughadors!
Oh laugh on, laugh laughadors!
You who laugh in laughs, ha-hah, you who laphorize
so laughly,
Oh laugh forth, laugh laugh belaulghly!
Oh of laughdoms overlaulghy, laugh of laughish
laughadors!
Oh forth laugh downright laughly, laugh of super-
laughadors!
Laughery! Laughery!
Belaugh, uplaugh, laughikins, laughikins,
Laughutelets, laughutelets!
Oh laugh forth, laugh laughadors!
Oh laugh on, laugh laughadors!

the old language "too feeble to catch up with life's gallop," and against "the old great," the Pushkins, Dostoyevskys, Tolstoys, to be "thrown overboard from the steamship of modernity." This declaration of destructiveness and anarchism, derided by the philistines as "the eccentricity of madmen," "has proven to be a diabolical intuition embodied in the stormy Today," owing to the all-broadening war. The war and the impending "unknown" prompt Mayakovsky to call for new dimensions and new approaches: "Painter! Will you attempt to capture speeding cavalry with the tiny net of contours?.....Poet! Do not seat a mighty battle into the rocking-chair of iambs and trochees.....Who can discern behind a Cossack whoop the warble of mandolinist Bryusov?" The new voice, born of war and of the revolution already glimmering on the horizon, Mayakovsky defines as Futurism:

Today we are all Futurists! The nation
is Futurist!

Futurism has seized Russia in a dead lock.

You who fail to see Futurism ahead of you and are incapable of peering into your selves, you have raised a cry about its death. Yes, Futurism is dead -- as a particular group, but it has suffused you all like a flood. Well, since Futurism as an idea of the chosen few is dead, we no longer need it. The first, destructive part of our program, we regard completed. Don't be surprised then if today in place of a jester's rattle you will observe in our hands the design of an architect, and if the voice of Futurism, yesterday still soft from sentimental dreaminess, will pour forth with the vigor of a sermon.

II

In October, 1917, Mayakovsky saw his prophecy fulfilled. The Bolshevik Revolution, with its sweeping abolition of institutions, beliefs, traditions, attitudes and relationships, appealed to him as a cleansing hurricane, and won him over at once and fully. Next to Valery Bryusov, the leading Symbolist,

Mayakovsky was the only prominent poet to place himself unreservedly at the service of the new order immediately upon its introduction. The last thirteen years of his life were his most active years and were wholly dedicated to the gigantic tasks that confronted the country. He did not hesitate to use his pen for "propaganda;" in fact nearly everything he wrote after October, 1917, was propaganda in behalf of the newly found ideal. In his teens he had joined the Bolshevik faction, and paid for it with eleven months of prison. His allegiance was, however, skin deep, and upon his release he entered the ranks of Bohemia, living boisterously and without aim, hating his environment and harboring only destructive passions. The October Revolution filled him with a purpose, gave vent for his hatred, and imbued him with a positive aspiration -to build a new life over the ruins of the old. How could he help being a champion, a propagandist, once in the grip of the all-absorbing ideal which dictated his thoughts and feelings and actions? He put all of himself into his work, whether it was a long epic, play, lyric, or a poster, a caricature (he drew powerful cartoons), a militant slogan, a short and poignant satire on one of the multiple evils and issues of the day. Whatever came from under his pen had the sparkle of his talent, the unmistakable Mayakovsky touch that distinguished every utterance of his, regardless of the subject-matter. For to him form was all-important: the form in which the revolution could be expressed was to be as fresh and new as the very contents of the new life. This is why with Mayakovsky Futurism, in his own practice at any rate, was not an external whim but the inseparable essence of his creative self - and of the revolution.

In this belief as to the synonymity of Futurism and the revolution Mayakovsky and his friends soon came to grief. Their demand of a clean sweep of past models and authorities, and, next, their posing as the sole representatives of proletarian art, clashed with the official views. The Marxians have time and again emphasized (no one more strongly than Lenin)

the evolutionary nature of socialist culture and its unavoidable discipleship of preceding masters and schools. They urged the Communists to try to absorb the best of bourgeois productions, and to give up the silly notion of hurling Pushkin "overboard from the steamship of modernity." Equally opposed was the Party to any art group claiming hegemony within the state; the claim of the Futurists was resented as decidedly as that of the Proletarian RAPP³ a few years later.

Mayakovsky's theoretical views were neither solid nor stubborn; in any event, the effect on his poetry was rather uncertain. His confidence in the leadership of the Party impelled him to adapt these views time and again, with no detriment to the quality of his writings. In 1923, he organized the LEF (Left Front) organ, whose policy seemed to be a departure from pure Futurism, but which permitted a new variety of formalistic heresy, factualism. Four years later Mayakovsky began to publish The New LEF, more outspokenly "proletarian" in tone, but in September, 1928, he withdrew from the group, and delivered a public address under the title "To the Left of LEF." One year later he organized the group REF (Revolutionary Front) and in February, 1930, two months before his death, he joined the RAPP, at the moment considered 100 per cent orthodox and loyal. This shift of groups need not be taken seriously, as far as Mayakovsky's poetic integrity is concerned; but it is evident that the question as to where he should "belong" did trouble his mind and might have contributed to the final catastrophe, of which later. Whatever his theoretical vagaries, they did not prevent him from serving the new order in a tirelessly dynamic fashion, with pen and brush and voice, ever on the go, addressing public meetings, soldiers, factory workers in every part of vast Russia and even abroad, through Europe and the Americas.

3. "Russian Association of Proletarian Writers," disbanded in 1932.

Buffon's maxim is most strikingly illustrated by Mayakovsky, for in his case the style and the man were practically identical. Elemental by nature and of a rather elementary education, Mayakovsky grew up like some grand primitive, who regarded himself and life with wonderment and admiration, and who was free from the burden of traditions and all superimposed rules and forms. He was enraptured with his self, the man in him, with his two fine arms, that "can move from the right to the left and the left to the right," with his "precious mind" sparkling in the jewel-box of a cranium, with his marvelous red tongue, a voice that can shout "oh-ho-ho," and that "extraordinary lump beating under the wool of his waistcoat." ("Man," 1916). The primitive resents society, the tyrant that clips man's wings, chains him, emasculates life. In his satirical, "Hymn to the Judge" (1915), galley slaves sing of their Peruvian paradise destroyed by a judge with eyes -- "a pair of tin cans glimmering in a garbage hole." The judge's eye, "austere like lent," causes the magnificent tail of an orange-blue peacock to "fade momentarily." As for the colibri that flew in the prairies, the judge has captured them and shaved their "down and feathers." He has shut down the flaming volcanoes that rose from the valleys, putting up signs, "This Valley for Non-Smokers." Of course, he has banned Mayakovsky's verses as "another intoxicating drink." The poet, naturally, rebels against this man-made tyranny in all its ramifications. Such in a nutshell is Mayakovsky's early creed, a variant of individualistic anarchism, expressed in a suitably unique style.

"A Cloud in Pants" (1915) is the most characteristic long poem of Mayakovsky. Here primitive exuberance alternates with sophisticated satire and venomous hatred of the modern environment. The pattern is intricate, extremely individual notes interwoven with social motives. This complexity is foreshadowed in the "Prologue," where he "teases" the smug reader with the alternative of being "ferocious, or, changing tones like the sky, irreproachably tender, not a male

but a cloud in pants." The poet's "I" dominates the poem from the beginning to the end, varying in mood and key, the sardonically arrogant note prevailing. Thus, "I, insolent and caustic, shall satiate myself with mockery. There is not one white hair in my soul, nor is there any senile tenderness! Bethundering the world with the might of my voice, I march -- handsome, twenty-two-year-old." Or, further down: "Glorify me! I am no match for the great. I inscribe 'nihil' over everything done before." "I shall go away, and insert into my wide open eye the sun as a monocle....Ahead of me I shall lead on a chain Napoleon, like a dog." Here and there megalomania gives place to dog-like humility and the groan of an aching heart. Mayakovsky, loather of sentimentalism and hackneyed words, holds his own even when he faces such an ancient theme as unrequited love. He employs old words and much used similes with ironic exaggeration, and lends his personal grief a Gargantuan aspect, the tragic mingling with the comic and tempered by it. Rejected by "Maria" he telephones to his mother: "Hello! ...Mama? Mama! Your son is superbly sick! Mama! He has a conflagration of the heart. Tell my sisters.... he has no place to go to. Every word, even the jest which he belches through his singed mouth, is hurled out like a naked prostitute from a bawdy house that's on fire." Then he proceeds to picture the conflagration in his heart, with firemen in brass helmets and heavy boots scaling his ribs, and himself making a desperate and vain effort to "leap out of his heart." Despite this method, Mayakovsky fails to conceal the genuineness of his yearning pain.

In fact, he is most genuine and convincing when he opens his heart and becomes human-all-too-human. Pretensions are then discarded, obsessions of grandeur are replaced by the humble cry of a big, an "enormous" body "at night craving to hide its resonance into something soft, womanly." His entreaties to "Maria," despite all the hyperboles, betray his helplessness before a primitive emotion. He does not speak of "love," of moonlight and flowers, and the

rest of the hateful heritage; his words and similes are coarse and heavy, but, as he says with a smirk: "When my voice bellows lewdly.....perhaps Jesus Christ smells the forget-me-nots of my soul." He modestly admits that, unlike the poet who composes sonnets for his beloved, he is "all flesh, all man - he begs for her body as Christians pray, 'Give us this day our daily bread.'" "Maria!" he cries: "Your name I dread to forget, as a poet is afraid to forget a certain, in the pangs of night born, word, in majesty equal to God. Your body I shall guard and love, as a soldier hacked by the war, unwanted, nobody's, guards his only leg." Since Maria does not respond to his pleas, he "will once more, dark and downcast, take his heart, bedrip it with tears, and carry it as a dog carries into the kennel its paw run over by a train." Job-like he proceeds to blaspheme, but less respectfully, threatening to knife "Mr. God" "from here to Alaska." The "tetrptych" concludes in a minor note: "The universe sleeps, its huge ear resting on a paw with claws of stars."

Parallel with this personal lyricism, the poem contains a motive of rebellion. Mayakovsky addresses the "street thousands - students, prostitutes, contractors," not as a superior, but as one of the lowly," vomited by a consumptive night into the palm of Moscow." He is a twentieth century Francois Villon, a singer of the rabble, of criminals and street-walkers, of the low and the destitute. The poet, "a lipshouting Zarathustra of the day," he "of the most golden mouth, whose every word newbears the soul, angeldays the body," calls upon the crowds to show self-respect. "You are not beggars, you dare not beg for alms!" He tells them that though convicts and lepers, they may be "purer than Venetian azure." They are pockmarked and besmudged, "yet the sun would grow dim, on beholding the gold quartz of our souls!" The poet himself "derided by today's tribe like a long scabrous anecdote," assures the crowds that he is capable of seeing ahead where "men's dock-tailed eye stops short." In deed, he prophesies, proving wrong

only by one year," the advent of the year Sixteen, in the thorny crown of revolutions." Mayakovsky proclaims himself the "forerunner" of the pending event: "I am where there's pain, everywhere. On every drop of a flowing tear I have crucified myself...." The "event" he describes graphically enough (we must remember, as he did, the savage war censorship of 1915): "Suddenly both the stormclouds and other cloud-folk raised an unheard-of racket in the sky, as though white-bloused workmen scurried, declaring a furious strike against the sky. Raging, thunder crept out from behind a cloud, saucily blew its gigantic nostrils, and for a second the skyey face twitched in the stern grimace of an iron Bismarck."

Mayakovsky envisages the revolution as a bloody affair, unlike the majority of the Russian intelligentsia who had dreams of a gentle, fairytale-like transformation. He foresees another "General Galliffet come to shoot the rebels! Take the hands out your pockets, you strollers, pick up a stone, a knife, or a bomb, and he who has no hands let him come and butt with his forehead!" Parodying the New Testament, Mayakovsky roars: "Come ye who are hungry, sweaty, meek, soured in flea-ridden filth! Come! Mondays and Tuesdays we shall color into holidays with blood!.... And so that in the fever of cannonade flags may wave, as on any decent holiday -- raise higher, O lamp-posts, the gory corpses of shopkeepers." It is clear that at the moment Mayakovsky's vision of the revolution did not go beyond riot, anarchy, and slaughter.

I have dwelt at some length on "A Cloud in Pants," because this poem epitomizes Mayakovsky's art both before and after 1917. For although with the revolution he matured politically, and as a tribune of the people he began to write more simply, Mayakovsky remained essentially the same as a man and as a poet. This brings us back to the question of his style, which must be discussed if only briefly.

III

By his upbringing and makeup Mayakovsky was an enemy of the social order as it existed before 1917. He detested everything connected with it, above all its aesthetics, in which he saw the reflection of its tyranny and smugness. From his very first attempt at writing he steadfastly eschewed the use of words that comprise the stock and trade of conventional poetry. In all his voluminous output you will not find a single worn epithet for the description of nature or man or emotions. When he does employ canned phrases, he obviously holds his tongue in his cheek, as some of the quoted excerpts may show. Yet Mayakovsky's rich and colorful (at times even gaudy) vocabulary has nothing of the zaumny, irrational element introduced by some Futurists. He does not coin entirely new words, but rather multiplies and variegates existing roots by means of the endless choice of prefixes and suffixes that makes the Russian speech so elastic, precise, and suggestive. By taking liberties with grammar and syntax, by the unexpected juxtaposition of sounds and words, he lends freshness and newness to otherwise familiar language. He does not hesitate to abbreviate or augment words, or to combine two into one, for the sake of nuance and euphony, nor to change adverbs into adjectives, verbs into nouns, and vice versa, nor to omit prepositions, when the meaning is clear without them, especially when their presence may produce cacophony. His language thus escapes being smooth and neat, calm and correct "like the pulse of a corpse." It belongs not to the study or salon, but to the street, and is therefore bold, irregular, trenchant, and laconic.

Similarly, in prosody Mayakovsky revolts against canonized aesthetics. The melodiousness of Russian tonic-syllabic verse nauseated him with its trim regularity. His verse is based on the number of stressed syllables in a line, with no regard for the non-stressed syllables; this results in flexible tonality and greater freedom of rhythm. Coupled with

metric irregularity is the typographic feature of broken lines. Mayakovsky writes not for silent reading, but for loud declamation. Not trusting punctuation marks (he uses few, mostly points of interrogation and exclamation), he directs the reader's intonation by making each line an accented unit, virtually a caesura. Accordingly his line often consists of one word. The passages I have quoted would have to be read differently, if printed as in the original. This one, for instance, from page 32:

Maria!

Your name I dread to forget,
as a poet is afraid to forget
a certain
in the pangs of night born word,
in majesty equal to God.
Your body
I shall guard and love
as a soldier
hacked by the war,
unwanted,
nobody's,
guards his only leg.

This rhythm became particularly apt during the revolutionary years, when Mayakovsky acted as a "drummer" (he drew endless sonorities out of baraban, the Russian word for drum), addressing himself to great masses, to marching soldiers. His celebrated "Left March," (1918) dedicated to the Red sailors, in which each of the four stanzas ends with the refrain

Left!
Left!
Left!

was recited and later sung collectively in pageants and processions, the marchers following the beats of the lines, as Mayakovsky meant them to be declaimed. His is, indeed, a revolutionary rhythm, dynamic and elemental, of a zigzaggy tempo.

Mayakovsky's verse, when not free or blank, is rhymed in the most whimsical way. He has discovered a wealth of consonant possibilities, for the most part unprecedented in Russian poetry. He alternates subtle inner rhymes with clusters of words combined to echo the ending of a previous line. And some of his rhyming stunts verge on puns, and make one question the poet's earnestness.

More important a feature of Mayakovsky's style are his metaphors. Here he manifestly differs both from realist and symbolist poets, for his images are neither of the everyday variety, as with the former, nor do they represent abstractions, as with the latter. In the language of the Schoolmen, he strives after realiora. He is never abstract, and even supernatural images he drags down to earth and renders concrete and sensory. At the same time he clothes his metaphors in a hyperbolic form, deliberately, and often not without humor, exaggerating dimensions and concepts. The description of his heart on fire, quoted above, is a case in point. After 1917, especially in his Mystery Bouffe (1918) and in 150,000,000 (1919), Mayakovsky made abundant use of this hyperbolic style. The revolutionary upheaval, complicated by wars, invasions, blockade, and their concomitant misery and suffering, heightened the tone of life, quickened its tempo, in a word - lent life a heroic style. Mayakovsky felt in his element, employing, and even enhancing his hyperbolic method, now that his country and his people defeated seemingly unsurmountable obstacles, and made the improbable real. There is elemental grandeur in his Unclean Ones storming the universe (Mystery Bouffe), or in his titanic Woodrow Wilson, personifying the capitalist order, and equally improbable Ivan, the collective embodiment of the victorious proletariat (150,000,000). The revolutionary period, its formative years, its groping efforts at destroying and building, its Homeric aspect, found a suitable poet in Mayakovsky.

Space does not permit an analysis of Maya-

kovsky's huge output. Aside from his numerous small poems - lyrics, satires, marches, propaganda pieces on various issues of the moment, verses for children, essays and speeches, mention should be made of his large compositions. Prior to 1917, he published, besides "A Cloud in Pants," a tragedy "Vladimir Mayakovsky" (1912), two cycles of "War" (1914 and 1917), "Flute-Spinal Chord" (1916), "Man" (1916). The dominant motive during this phase is "I," "Mayakovsky," preoccupation with himself and his moods -- as exemplified in such themes and titles as -- "Today I shall play on a Flute. On my own spinal chord;" "To myself, the beloved, are these lines dedicated by the author;" "Mayakovsky's Nativity;" "Mayakovsky's Passions;" "Mayakovsky's Ascension;" "Mayakovsky in Heaven;" "Mayakovsky to the Ages." Along with this motive, the poet voices his disgust with the world as it is, he hurls invectives and threats at the smug and stagnant social order, but he sees no way out, and consequently sounds a rather dismal note.

About nine-tenths of his work Mayakovsky wrote after 1917. During the last thirteen years of his life he grew to his full stature. The revolution and its multiple tasks filled his void, and gave meaning and content to his resentments, grievances, and vague aspirations. His style, too, matured, became free from obscurity, from trickery, from an excessive burden of similes, and from dispensable coarseness. A style of the street, it now represented not the street of strutting philistines, criminals, pimps, and prostitutes, but the streets and squares of a country jolted from age-old apathy to a desperate struggle for its existence and for a finer life. Mayakovsky was proud to consider himself a worker, a sharer in the national travail, never too squeamish about using his pen or brush or voice for "propaganda." "I feel as if I were a Soviet workshop, manufacturing happiness. I do not care to be plucked, after the day's toils, like a flower off the meadow....I want the Gosplan to sweat while discussing the assignment of my year's task. I want the pen to be put on the same footing with the

bayonet. I want Stalin in the name of the Politbureau to present reports on the production of verse along with reports on pig-iron and steel."

During these arduous years, in the rare moments of leisure he could find what with the daily "attacks" he waged against enemies of the new order, and his frequent travels at home and abroad, Mayakovsky managed to compose a few large poems and plays. Of the latter, two were in verse -- Mystery Bouffe and 150,000,000, and two in prose -- The Bedbug (1928) and The Bathhouse (1930). The former two are heroic rhapsodies of the revolution at its height, while the prose plays castigated philistine smugness which began to raise its head in the "normal" years that followed the civil wars. Among his travel poems the cycle on America (1925-1926) is worth noting. He caught the rhythm of the country, mingling his admiration for New York and its technological advancement with a revulsion from the wastage and cruelty of its economic order. His poem "'Tis Good!" (1927) voices his militant optimism about the land of Soviets. Occasionally, as in "Of This" (1923) he reverts to his old preoccupation with his self and his futile quest of completeness in love. Here the poet's ever-present note of personal lyricism merges with the broad notes of a national epic. His most ambitious long poem is "Vladimir Ilyich Lenin" (1924), written shortly after Lenin's death. The announcement of Lenin's death by Kalinin before the Congress of Soviets, and the scene of the funeral, are Mayakovsky's highest achievements. There is not one loud word or obvious emotionalism, and the author's unwonted reserve intensifies the tragic sense of the moment.

The life and work of Mayakovsky have been an open book, largely owing to the extrovert nature of his verse. He has turned himself inside out, flaunted intimate details of his past and present, painted a full-length and-depth self-portrait. Everything about him, as suggested previously, was elemental and elementary, therefore simple and lucid. Everything, ex-

cept for one thing: his end. The public was shocked and dumbfounded, when on April 14, 1930, Mayakovsky shot himself.

The premature death of a poet became, one might say, a tradition in Russia. One need only mention Pushkin and Lermontov, killed in duels at the age of thirty-seven and twenty-six, respectively; then, omitting other examples and taking into account only the first dozen years after the revolution, we come on the execution of the Acmeist poet, Gumilev, at the age of thirty-five; the deaths from physical exhaustion and mental apathy of the Symbolist Blok and the Futurist Khlebnikov (forty-one and thirty-seven); the suicides of the Imagist Esenin and of our Mayakovsky, thirty and thirty-six years old. All of them died primarily because of their failure to adjust themselves to the environment. Soviet public opinion was surprised by the death of Mayakovsky, because he had given no obvious signs of maladjustment.

On the contrary, five years previously, Esenin, a gifted flaxen-haired peasant lad from the province of Ryazan, cut his wrists and hanged himself, victim of drunken debauches, ill-digested fame and notoriety, and of an ideally mismatched marriage (to Isadora Duncan). Dipping the pen into the blood of his slashed wrists (there was a shortage of ink at the time) Esenin scribbled a farewell poem that ended with the lines:

In this life 'tis nothing new to die,
Nor is it, of course, more novel to live.

In a later essay, "How to Make Verses," reminiscent of Poe's would-be confession as to how he wrote his "Raven," Mayakovsky felt the need to counteract Esenin's gesture. Mayakovsky explained his methods and moods in composing the poem, "To Sergey Esenin" (1926), as well as his main motive. Esenin's final lines, he was convinced, precisely because they were in verse (his italics), "would draw many vacillating ones into the noose and in front of the revolver-muzzle." Maya-

kovsky's poem was written in his usual bantering tone, but one feels keenly the warmth of emotion and the personal concern of a poet chiding his brother for his faint-hearted act. He admits that "this time is rather hard for the pen," but then, he asks, "where, when, what great man has chosen a worn and easy path?" Life must be remade -- such is the task of the moment. He ends the poem with a paraphrase of Esenin's lines:

In this life
 'tis not hard to die.
To mold life
 is far more difficult.

This sentiment deceived the public as to Mayakovsky's state of mind. He probably deceived himself into believing that he was perfectly at home and at ease under the Soviet regime. There is no question about the utter sincerity and absolute loyalty of his attitude toward the new order. His service to the "attacking class" was both whole-hearted and effective, the latter being acknowledged even by Vladimir Lenin⁴, who personally failed to appreciate Mayakov-

4. In the *Izvestia* for March 5, 1922, Mayakovsky satirized bureaucratic methods of endless sessions and discussions of trivial matters, in a poem titled "Outsitters." The next day Lenin mentioned this satire in a public speech:

"I do not belong to the admirers of his poetic talent, though I fully admit my incompetence in that field. But it's a long time since I've experienced such pleasure from the political and administrative point of view. In his poem Mayakovsky makes deadly fun of (bureaucratic) meetings, and ridicules Communists who sit and oversit in sessions. I do not know about the poetry, but I vouch that politically it is absolutely correct. We do find ourselves in the position (and one must say, a silly position it is) of men who are perpetually in session, who compose commissions, plans - to infinity."

Needless to say, Lenin's praise was of inestimable encouragement to the poet who declared himself a "sewer-cleaner and water-carrier, mobilized and summoned by the Revolution."

sky's poetry. But neither can there be a question about the inner split experienced by the poet most of the time, even or especially when he protested his buoyant faith the loudest. His difficulty of "molding a life" consisted in harmonizing the moods and whims of the Bohemian individualist that he had been up to 1917, with the convictions of the disciplined Bolshevik he valiantly strove to be thereafter. His last poems, especially "Of This" and "In Full Voice" (1930), show the tragic contradiction within him in a cumulative intensity that proved catastrophic. He confesses that time and again he made an effort to stifle the individualist in him, by "putting his foot on the throat of his song." But the half-smothered note persisted as an overtone, and insinuated itself now and then as a moan. I refer to such recurrent motives of loneliness, of suicide, of irresponsible love, of being misunderstood and underrated by his contemporaries. Here belongs his masterly "Jubilean," wherein he takes the bronze Pushkin for a stroll after removing him from his pedestal on the Moscow square, and pours his heart out to him in a half-jesting tone, behind which one feels his profound pain. He confides to his great predecessor that soon he too would die, and then their names would stand not so wide apart in the alphabet of the great.

The immediate causes of his suicide were apparently a combination of illness (lingering grippe), loneliness, persecution, and what he regarded as unrequited love. Although he had parted company with Futurism and LEF, and had joined the arch-orthodox RAPP, some zealots continued to taunt him and to doubt his devotion. A few days before his death he declared publicly: "They hang so many dogs on me, and accuse me of so many sins.....that at times I feel like going off somewhere for a couple of years, only not to hear the abuse." His intimate friends, notably Aseyev, have much to say about the nagging and sarcastic remarks Mayakovsky had to suffer from those Torquemadas. As to his well-known love for the wife of a close comrade and collaborator, Mayakovsky's farewell poem contains a

sufficient hint that not all was smooth in their relations. Here are a few lines from his final message:

Already past one.

You must be in bed.

Across the night

the milky way

a silver Oka River.

I am in no hurry

and am not going

to wake you

with special telegrams

and disturb you.

As they say

the incident is closed.

Love boat smashed against environment.

You and I

are quits.

No need listing

mutual hurts

sorrows

and grievances

Look

how peaceful the world.

Night

has imposed on the sky

a starry contribution.

At just such hours

you rise up

and speak

to ages

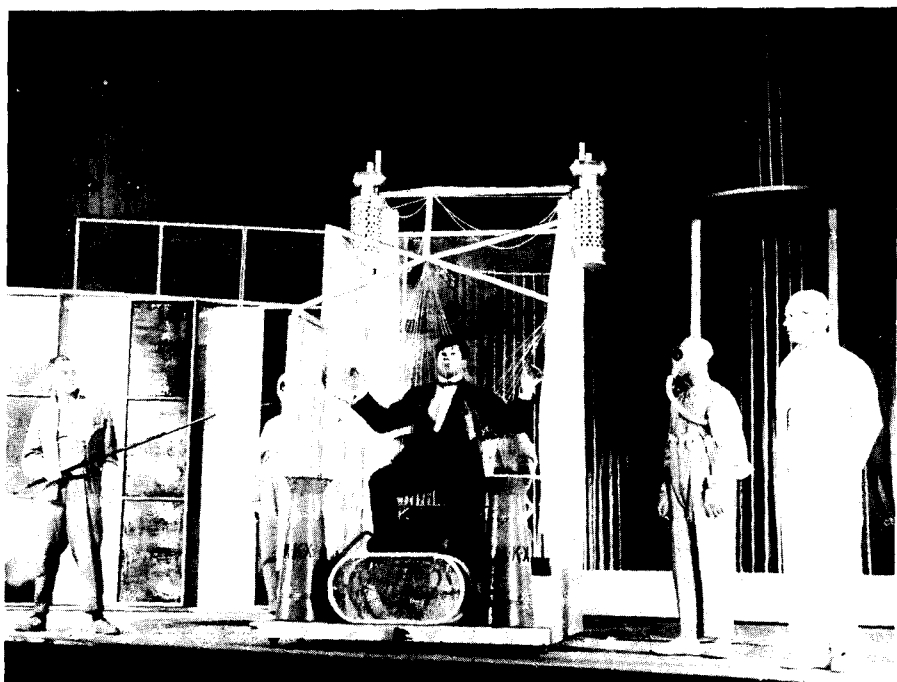
to history

to creation.

Some of the puns and nuances are of course lost in translation. In the final version the lines "you and I are quits" were changed to "life and I are quits." Mayakovsky was fastidious in his last hours, and tried to make his death as neat and free from scandal as possible. In a letter addressed before his

death to "Mama, sisters, comrades" he apologized for what he was about to do and ended with the request: Please don't gossip. "The deceased disliked that awfully."

Let us resist, therefore, the temptation to gossip. It is clear, "clear to the point of hallucination," as Mayakovsky would say, that the poet was not a monolith. His inner conflicts made his life a tragedy, but they were hardly detrimental to his poetry. The two, or more, selves of this monumental child of nature were voiced forcefully and with unique skill. Regardless of his emotional "deviations," Mayakovsky's work will live chiefly as an expression of the Will to Revolution.



Scene from THE BED-BUG

MAYAKOVSKY'S PLAYS

by
H. W. L. Dana

"Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy"

Saint Petersburg, October, 1913. It was still eight months before the beginning of the World War. The Tsar, Nicholas II, was in his palace. Old Russia was enjoying the Imperial Ballet at the Mariinski Theatre or the good old Russian repertoire of plays at the Alexandrinski. But that evening in a small out-of-the way theatre in Saint Petersburg, which called itself proudly "The First Futuristic Theatre in the World," an extraordinary play was produced. It was a tragedy in verse, with a prologue, two acts and an epilogue, written by a Futurist poet, a young overgrown boy of only nineteen years. He had already spent eleven months in one of the Tsar's prisons and had just published three daring articles on theatres in Russia, declaring, "it is our duty to break up and revolutionize everything old in the theatre." His name was Vladimir Mayakovsky and with unabashed egotism he called his play by his own name: "Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy."

In this immature play, full of many of the absurdities of the Symbolists and Futurists, Mayakovsky makes himself the central character, so that the play is practically one long monologue by himself, broken only with occasional speeches by the other characters. Vladimir Mayakovsky, in one scene dressed in a toga, is searching for his "unseen soul" in order that he may put healing flowers into the wound of her mouth. Other women try to console him. A "Woman with a Tear," a "Woman with a Little Tear," and a "Woman with a Big Tear" -- all offer their tears -- and their kisses -- to him; but he refuses to be comforted. A "Man without an Eye and without a Leg" (his leg is

pursuing him several blocks away along the street), a "Man without an Ear," a "Man without a Head," all appear on the scene. An "Old Man with Black Dry Cats - Several Thousand Years Old" comes in and says that Mayakovsky is crucifying a cry of agony upon a cross of laughter.

As we listen to this tragedy of the nineteen year-old Mayakovsky, we catch echoes of Blok, Balmont and Bely. Yet here there are already flashes of Mayakovsky's startling frankness. From the rubbing of the hairs of those "Black Dry Cats" come sparks that foretell his later fondness for electrification. His merciless attack on property and property-owners gives us a premonition of the coming revolution.

"Mystery-Bouffe"

Petrograd, November 7, 1918. The first anniversary of the October Revolution. To the west, Germany was still fighting the Allies, but revolution was breaking out there and the Armistice was only four days off. On the streets of Petrograd were posters announcing the celebration of the capture of the Winter Palace and the seizing of power by the Soviets which had taken place one year earlier. The crowds gazed with especial curiosity at a strange poster on a bill-board, representing in the center a map of the "Old World" crossed out with bold strokes. Above and below was printed this announcement:

"We - Poets, Artists, Theatre Directors and Actors - Will Celebrate the Anniversary of the October Revolution with a Revolutionary Spectacle '!MYSTERY-BOUFFE!' An Heroic, Epic, and Satiric Representation of Our Time by V. Mayakovsky. Scenes designed by Malevich. Play directed by Meyerhold."

In this combination of Mayakovsky, the Futurist poet; Malevich, the leader of the Suprematist painters; and Meyerhold, the daring revolutionist of the theatre-the three mighty M's-the air of Petrograd

on the eve of this anniversary was electric with excitement. This was to be the first Soviet play written by a Soviet author and acted in a Soviet theatre.

But what was a "Mystery-Bouffe?" Like a "mystery" in medieval drama the action was to shift from Earth to Hell to Purgatory and Paradise; but, as in "opera-bouffe," it was to be travestied throughout in a mock heroic manner, full of buffoonery. Dante, in his "Divine Comedy," had passed from Hell through Purgatory to Paradise. Mayakovsky, however, in this very "Undivine Comedy," makes fun of all these medieval conceptions of the "Other World," and has his workers pass on beyond Paradise into an earthly commune of sunshine.

This curious extravaganza was acted in what was then called "The Communal Theatre of Musical Drama" -- the great hall of the Conservatory, just opposite the Mariinski Opera House. A wildly enthusiastic audience was packed into that huge auditorium for that first performance on November 7, 1918. Among others was the greatest Russian poet of that period, Alexander Blok. They waited eagerly for the curtain to go up in the traditional way, but, on an occasion such as this, they did not know just what to expect.

In the Prologue, seven pairs of grimy workers -- blacksmiths, miners, carpenters, bakers, farm hands, etc. -- jumped up on the stage in front of the curtain crying out that the earth had called upon them with a voice like a roar of cannon. The fields, drunk with blood, had swollen to give birth to them. In the past, books such as the Bible or the Koran or Milton's "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained" had cleverly promised them happiness only after death. But they wanted to live happily here on earth. Books had given them only paper passions, but they wanted to live with live love. The theatres had shown them the tinsel of old-fashioned aristocratic costumes, but they wanted a drama in which they themselves should play an important role. They cried: "Make place for us! Today,

above the dust of the theatres, in electric lights shines out our motto -- 'EVERYTHING ANEW!'"

Then, to show the contempt of the Futurists for the old theatres of the Russian aristocracy and bourgeoisie, the workers proceeded to tear down the elaborate velvet curtain, painted over and pasted over with shabby relics of the old-fashioned stage. From then on, the regisseur Meyerhold produced the rest of this play -- and indeed all his later plays -- without the use of any curtain separating the stage from the audience. The stage, instead of being a small room set apart and seen through the proscenium arch as through a keyhole, became the entire auditorium. In this play a row of actors circled the back of the hall and from time to time they surged up from out of the audience on to the stage.

When the old-fashioned theatre curtain has been torn away, we see, under the glow of the Aurora Borealis of the Arctic Region, the uppermost tip of our terrestrial globe. The revolution, we learn, has spread from Russia to Germany (the November Ninth Revolution in Germany broke out only two days after this performance.) It has spread to the whole of Europe and to America. The North Pole alone remains free so far from revolution. Representatives of the upper classes of all countries - a German officer, a French premier, an American capitalist, an Indian Rajah, a Turkish Pasha, a Russian priest, etc. -- trying to escape the World Revolution, climb up here to the North Pole. As the rising tide of revolution threatens to flood the entire globe, they decide to save themselves from this Second Deluge by building a new Noah's Ark. Disregarding the Biblical injunction that they "should not call any man common or unclean," these seven pairs of so-called "clean ones" have great contempt for the common men, the workers, the great unwashed, whom they call "unclean." But the "clean ones" do not wish to soil their hand with hard work. They need the "unclean," the workers, to build the Ark for them.

Once safely on board the Ark, however, the seven clean pairs stick the seven unclean pairs into the hold and try to keep them in subjection, first by putting a new Tsar over them and then, when that does not work, by camouflaging their control over the workers under the title of "Republic." Yet the workers soon find that a "Republic" may only be, as they say, a "Tsar with a hundred mouths." While the clean ones are gorging themselves with food and drink, the unwashed emerge from the hold and themselves take over the control of the Ship of State. Gazing out across the surface of the water in search of a Mount Ararat on which they may land their Ark, they see a man approaching them on the surface of the water, who at first seems to be He that walked upon the Sea of Galilee. But they themselves are despised men "from Nazareth" and know that this is no god. The stranger explains that he is a man of the most ordinary sort: "I am of no class, no nation, no race.....I am simply the Man of the Future. I know how hard human life is..... Listen to a new Sermon on the Mount: There are no Ararats....But there are earthly heavens - for all except the poor in spirit -- a kingdom on earth and not in the sky.....Where is this Promised Land? Here on earth to make it yours!" He disappears, but the workers feel that this Man of the Future is now within themselves. They climb up the mast of the ship, up the rigging, up along ladders of sunbeams, along rainbows, up through the clouds. This is part of the new mystery of this "Mystery-Bouffe."

In Hell the seven clean pairs are miserable. They insist on class distinctions even there. But for the unclean, Hell has no terrors. Those who have formerly slaved in the iron-smelting works, who have suffered from poison gas, who have faced machine guns, who have been frozen with cold, who have been driven on earth by human devils, are not afraid of these infernal horrors. The song of the workers resounds triumphantly as they march unafraid through the hollow halls of hell.

In Paradise -- the Paradise of Mensheviks -- the saints are sitting on nice little white clouds, orating. Mayakovsky brings in Methusaleh some two years before Bernard Shaw wrote "Back to Methusaleh." For the workers, these long-lived, long-bearded old prophets are a bore. So, too, is Rousseau with his "Social Contract" and Tolstoi with his "Non-Resistance." The workers need no condescending saviours. They are their own saviours. They snatch away the thunderbolts from Sabaoth, the Lord of Hosts, and use his sheaves of lightning to make electric power and, as the dawn is breaking, march on to their own earthly heaven -- "Beyond Paradise." Their Promised Land is not up in the clouds, but on the solid ground of this damned old earth of ours -- but an earth that has been changed. They feed their locomotives with "black bread" -- the coal of the Don Basin -- and their steamships with oil from Baku. The "Things" that they have been used to all of their lives are there at their service. The "Sickle" and the "Hammer," the emblems of the peasants and the workers, advance to the gate of the city to offer these peasants and workers "Bread and Salt," the emblems of hospitality. Tools, machines, engines with trains of railway cars following them like the tails of comets, all sorts of electrical devices, electric tractors, electric sowers, electric thrashers, all things are theirs. They have no masters. The workers are their own masters. As they enter this City of the Future, with its millions of electric lights and its rainbows and flower-like roofs, they see in the center of the city a garden of stars and the moon, surmounted by the shining crown of the sun. They sing together: "If this is the work of our hand, what door will not open before us? We are the architects of the world. We are the wonder makers. We shall pave the streets of the earth with stars. We shall be sun worshippers in the great cathedral of this world." Finally they burst into their "Hymn to the Sun": "Let the sun be warm and play and burn -- our sun. Let us play with the sun, roll the sun, play that we are the sun. Under us -- the sun, the sun, the sun....The sleep of centuries is blasted. Now comes a

sea full of mornings. Life is more intoxicating than barrels of wine. Rejoice, all who are strong, builders of the workers' world. Let us play a new game, joining hands in a circle. Chains of iron have given place to chains of loving hands. The granite of cities, the green of the country, are all ours. Let the factories give out smoke. Let the fields grow grain. All glory be to you! Shine forth, O sunny commune of ours."

Such was the burst of enthusiasm in the first fine careless rapture of the revolution. Lyric poets turned to imaginary revolutions, to world revolutions, to revolutions of the universe. It was only gradually that prose writers sobered down to write of the Russian Revolution realistically and dramatists to deal with it dispassionately. Meanwhile "Mystery-Bouffe" continued to be acted on various occasions -- once, for example, in German for a meeting of the Communist International. A second version, with a different prologue and a different ending was produced at Meyerhold's new theatre on May Day, 1921. This was after the Versailles Treaty and the intervention of England and France in Soviet Russia and, accordingly, Mayakovsky introduced into this later version Clemenceau and Lloyd George among the characters he satirized. As he said: "'Mystery-Bouffe' is a highway, the highway of the revolution." In the future, as that high-road runs through new surroundings, the setting and the scenery must change.

Short Plays, Scenarios, etc.

It was ten years before Mayakovsky produced a new full-length play. In the meanwhile, he wrote a number of short propaganda plays. In May, 1920, the students of the Satire Theatre put on a short play of his called "And What If?....May-Day Dreams in a Bourgeois Armchair." On January 29, 1921, the Theatre of Revolutionary Satire acted his "Play for Priests Who Do Not Understand What Holidays Are For." In 1922, in the Workers' and Red Army Men's Club, a somewhat simi-

lar play of his was produced, called "How One Spends Time Celebrating Holidays." In 1926, the group of actors called "Blue Blouses" put on a revolutionary grotesque in three scenes written by Mayakovsky in collaboration with Osip Brik and called "Radio-October."

The Second State Circus in Moscow acted a play especially written by Mayakovsky for the famous clown, Lazarenko, bringing in Woodrow Wilson, Baron Wrangel, Pilsudski, etc., and called "The Championship of the World Class Struggle." Somewhat later Mayakovsky wrote a more elaborate extravaganza for the First State Circus in Moscow, which was produced on April 21, 1930, just one week after Mayakovsky's death. It was written as part of the celebration in that year of the 25th anniversary of the Revolution of 1905 and was called "Moscow is Burning." It was an extraordinary pageant of all that had taken place in Russia since 1905. In the first part, a great pyramid was represented with the Tsar on top, then the Grand Dukes of Russia, then the potentates of the Russian Church, then the generals of the Tsar's army, and then the bourgeois capitalists and landlords, the whole borne on the shoulders of the workers. But, this being a workers' circus, you can be sure that the whole pyramid was reversed before the play was over, with the "upper classes" at the bottom and the workers on top.

After Mayakovsky's trip to America in 1925, which proved so disillusioning for a Futurist who had had so much faith in the future in America, he started a play called "A Comedy With Murder," intending to contrast Soviet and American culture, but only brief fragments of this were written before his death.

In 1927, for the tenth anniversary of the Revolution, Mayakovsky dramatized for the Small Opera Theatre in Leningrad a part of his famous poem called, "Good." This mass musical theatrical action he re-titled for this occasion "The 25th" - standing for the 25th of October, the old style date of the Bolshevik Revolution.

For a version which Meyerhold was planning of Shakespeare's "Hamlet," Mayakovsky was going to re-write the gravediggers' scene, introducing a lot of contemporary political buffoonery. Meyerhold was also proposing to get Mayakovsky to write a new text for Offenbach's operetta, "The Beautiful Helen." Both these projects, however, were cut short by Mayakovsky's untimely death.

Apart from the regular theatre and the circus, Mayakovsky took a great interest in the films and wrote a number of scenarios such as "The Children," "The Elephant and the Match," "The Heart of the Cinema," "The Love of the Wardrobe," "December Bellies and October Bellies," "How Do You Do?" "The History of a Gun," "Comrade Kopytko," and "Down with Fat!"

"The Bed-Bug"

From one of these films, entitled "Forget About the Fireplace," Mayakovsky developed the story for his next full-length play, called "The Bed-Bug," which was first produced at the Meyerhold Theatre in Moscow, on February 13, 1929. Here again we find Mayakovsky's fondness for contrasting the present and the future. The first half of the play is laid in that same year, 1929, but the second half, fifty years later, in 1979. The scientists of this later period announce a remarkable discovery. By chance, there has been preserved, frozen solid in a large block of ice, two horrible specimens of extinct species that had existed in the dark ages of 1929. One is a bed-bug and the other, apparently considered equally obnoxious, a bourgeois gentleman in a tuxedo jacket. It is a great question whether these should be preserved as a terrible warning for future generations or whether they should be destroyed for fear that the bacteria of hypocrisy and vanity from the 1920's might spread. A vote is taken from all quarters of the globe. By 1979 a world-wide mechanical device has been arranged by which a secret ballot from people all over the earth can be instantly recorded by iron hands in a central

voting machine. Apparently, curiosity has got the best of it and the vote is overwhelmingly in favor of having the scientists take the risk of resuscitating the bed-bug and the bourgeois specimen. Instantly, through microphones, reporters announce the news by radio to the Warsaw Komsomol Pravda, to the Red Gazette of Rome, to the Shanghai Daily Worker, and to the Izvestia of the Chicago Soviet. A few minutes later, the newsboys are on the streets with extras announcing that the world has decided that the bed-bug and its human counterpart should be brought back to life.

The scientists, in melting the ice and bringing back to life the two pernicious creatures, approach them carefully, wearing gas masks, so as not to be contaminated by the bad bourgeois ideology. All of a sudden the bed-bug escapes and some of the citizens of the future are bitten by the insect and catch this dangerous disease. Groups of girls and boys, foxtrotting and Charlestoning form a horrible sort of 30-headed 60-footed jitterbug. Finally, however, the bed-bug is recaptured and, together with the vodka-drinking, tobacco-spitting human beast, they are carefully placed in two cages in the zoological garden: one marked in Latin "Bedbugus Normalis" and the other "Bourgeoisus Vulgaris." A woman, who as a young girl fifty years before had committed suicide for love of this bourgeois gentleman, had a hard time explaining to the people of 1979 how she could have loved this man or why one should commit suicide. Mayakovsky himself was closer to 1929 than to 1979. One further detail is worth noting. A book has been preserved from that awful period of 1929. It is called "How I Became President" and was written by a certain Gerbert Hoover. These examples are preserved so that the children of the future may see what things were like in the early 20th century - before the whole world had become sanitary and communist.

"The Bath"

Leningrad, January 30, 1930. The Five-Year Plan was in full swing. The tempo of life was increasing, but there were still traces of bureaucracy and ignorance and stupidity that needed to be liquidated. A fierce attack on these pernicious elements was made in Mayakovsky's last play, "The Bath," which was first produced on that date at the Branch of the Great Dramatic Theatre in Leningrad. A little later, on March 16, 1930, only four weeks before Mayakovsky's death, it opened at the Meyerhold Theatre in Moscow.

Sometime earlier, Lenin, although he modestly confessed his incompetence to judge Mayakovsky's poetry as poetry, praised him highly for his attack on the bureaucrats and those who made too long speeches. Mayakovsky returns to his attack on bureaucrats in "The Bath." He gives it to them hot, or as the Russian slang goes, from which the play takes its name, he "gives them a hot bath."

Yet, just as thirteen years before Mayakovsky had set his seven pairs of unclean over against his seven pairs of clean, so now he sets over against these useless elements, some fine examples of persons who, scorned though they may be at first, prove to be the really helpful elements in Soviet society. First and foremost is an inventor, who, as his name implies, was looked upon as a sort of crazy crank, but who nonetheless finally succeeds in inventing a time-machine. The boy who assists him, a former homeless waif, cleverly snatches away from a foreign spy the notes made in order to steal the invention and manages to get money from the big bureaucrat who had refused to help. Then there is the bureaucrat's wife, whom he has considered of no importance, but who proves herself to be a far more valuable member of society than he. These, with the help of other good workers, succeed in perfecting the time-machine, which will enable them to increase the tempo of Soviet life and bring them in contact with the coming period of Communism --

now indicated as a hundred years in the future, in the year, 2030. They set up a Bureau for Selection and for Transfer into the Communist Period and, by means of their time-machine, receive into the present world a "delegate from the year 2030," a shining Phosphorescent Woman - a Woman of the Future, corresponding to the Man of the Future in "Mystery-Bouffe." She has come to select those who are to be transferred to the future. Those who are chosen as passengers on the time-machine come singing their vigorous "March of Time" with its refrain of "Time, forward!" "Forward, time!" This was the same slogan that was taken up two years later by Kataev in his well-known novel and play called "Time, Forward!"

As these workers are about to embark on their voyage, the Phosphorescent Woman addresses them as follows: "Comrades! At the first signal we shall whirl along forward, having broken through the tendency of time to grow old. The Future will accept all in whom is found any trait akin to the collective commune - the joy of working, the zeal of sacrifice, tireless effort in inventing, the satisfaction of giving to others, pride in mankind.....Hold on together in a mass, stronger and closer to one another. Time, as it flies, will throw off and rid itself of the ballast, the heavy useless junk of those who have become worthless through their lack of belief."

The big bureaucrat, who refused to help the workers, is flabbergasted at finding himself left behind when the time-machine flies off towards the future. Turning to the audience, he says: "What did the author of this play mean to say with all this? Did he mean that I and the like are not necessary to Communism?"

The Soviet audience, by their bursts of laughter, indicate that that was just what Mayakovsky meant to say.

REMINISCENCES OF MAYAKOVSKY

by
David Burliuk

The author of this article was not only the first to help Mayakovsky find himself, but also the first to publish the pioneering poems of this young genius, beginning in 1913. I must bear witness to the fact that Mayakovsky from the first days of his writings influenced the young poets, as a furious gale of tears the immobility of the ocean.

Since extensive study is being made of the literary heritage of Mayakovsky by Soviet critics and others, I will give here a sketch of Mayakovsky in the period between November 7, 1917 and April 2, 1918 when I embraced my dear former pupil, now an illustrious poet, and left turbulent Moscow for the Ural Mountains.

Mayakovsky was a man of the new epoch. The flag of Futurism was hoisted in Russia in 1911 and the poetry of Mayakovsky was born in the caldron of big Russian cities ready to burst against Tsarism. From 1911 when I first discovered Mayakovsky in the dusty corridors of the Moscow Academy of Arts until November, 1917, only six years elapsed, but during that time great changes came to the life of Russia. A nightmare of satanic bloodshed and the destruction of the first World War shook to the very foundations the backward, still semi-Asiatic country. The twister revolution was clearly visible on the horizon.

Mayakovsky also changed much during these six years. He was no longer "a tall uncombed and unwashed man with a face of an Apache. A youth with burning sarcastic dark eyes in his dusty, velvet blouse." Mayakovsky was now a famous poet whose name was on the lips of all literate Russia. In 1916, a volume of his poems was published by A. N. Tikhonoff.

Maxim Gorky became interested in his work and in 1915 Mayakovsky began his historic friendship with Lila and Osip Brik who supported him by paying him 50 kopeks -- half a ruble -- for every line he wrote. In his autobiography, his meeting with the Briks was mentioned as a "most joyful date."

Mayakovsky now became a victor in life. His terrible needs and sufferings of early youth that followed him from 1906, when at the age of 12 he lost his father, at last were over. But in 1915, the poet was mobilized and he remained in military service until 1916. When the October Revolution came, for Mayakovsky and his brother Futurists the question "to accept or not to accept the revolution" did not exist.

Mayakovsky met the revolution as a long-expected joyful miracle. Even in 1915 in his poem, "A Cloud in Pants," the poet prophesied that the revolution, the hordes of hungry people in thorny crowns, was approaching in 1916. Brilliant prophet that he was, Mayakovsky was mistaken by only one year. When the October uprising came, Mayakovsky was in Petrograd. He went to Smolny Institute which rises like a sullen rock on the banks of the Neva; to Smolny, where in Room 18 the Bolshevik parliamentary group worked and in Rooms 10 and 11 the Revolutionary War Committee.

Mayakovsky worked in Smolny as a private soldier of the new Bolshevik regime. In his autobiography he proudly noted: "Worked. All that happened." Now the revolution that had long been heralded by Mayakovsky had come and the poet without any reserve started to sing of new themes and subjects. Usievich wrote in 1930 that from the moment of the October Revolution the creative genius of Mayakovsky abandoned personal motifs which had been characteristic of his earlier literary period. The more youthful poems of Mayakovsky were often stamped with delirious pessimism but thoughts of suicide (cf. "Man" published in 1916) now receded to give place to the super-optimistic ringing of the voice of the poet. Space does not per-

mit mention of all the poetical works of Mayakovsky in which he pictures the cyclone of the revolution. In his good poetry, Mayakovsky portrayed, down to the most minute details, the historical days when he worked at Smolny.

We were three brothers - "three elephants of New Art in Russia" - Mayakovsky, Burluk and Kamensky. Kamensky and I met the October Revolution in Moscow. Street fighting continued there much longer than in Petrograd, for the White Guards put up a more stubborn resistance and it took nearly a week to crush them.

When a poet is cast in bronze and for centuries quietly ornaments some public square or graces some street with his name, the problem of food and lodging no longer exists for him. But for a live poet there are times when food and lodging are a difficult problem. Kamensky and I decided to open a cafe in a quiet narrow street in Moscow. Dmitri Petrovsky and I painted the interior of the very old barn-like brick building in a cubistic manner in black and sinister red. Tables and benches of unpainted pine and stages without curtains furnished the room. For two weeks we ran our "Cafe of the Poets" without Mayakovsky. He was in Petrograd, but the problem of the empty stomach soon sent him to join us in Moscow. The poet appeared on the stage before our visitors who were remnants of Moscow millionaires and members of the Red Militia. With colts, nagans and even sub-machine guns they welcomed him with whistling and applause. The streets of the revolution-shaken town were thickly covered with snow. Many lanterns in the streets were broken during the fighting and the darkness of the night often resounded with the shots of brigands. January, February and March of 1918 saw the three of us running the historic "Cafe of the Poets" on Anastassevsky Pereulok.

Thousands of visitors came and they will remember forever the recitations they heard from the stage of our cafe. For the first time Mayakovsky recited his famous "March of the Futurists" and his new-

est composition "Left March." As if charmed, the visitors forgot their cutlets, soup, fish, "pirozhky" and devoured instead the lines of Mayakovsky's poems "Man" "War and Peace" and "Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy."

Moscow in those days was filled with an extraordinary mixture of currents of the past and the future. The past faded away quickly. Fragments of the old nobility and bourgeoisie tried to escape from Moscow. The young Soviets with great energy suppressed banditry and the anarchistic elements which swarmed in the enormous town. Echoes of Mayakovsky's poems soon reached the Kremlin and A. V. Lunacharsky, then Commissar of Education, came to our cafe as guest of honor one evening in March, 1918. In the Kremlin, revolutionary chiefs began to appreciate the tremendous talent of Mayakovsky and his usefulness to the Revolution, and three years later, in 1921, Mayakovsky started to write regularly for Izvestia. Mayakovsky was from that year recognized as the official laureate of the Revolution. In 1925, Mayakovsky published his greatest poem, "Vladimir Ilyich Lenin," an eternal monument to Lenin and in the crucial years of the civil war and hunger, 1918-1921, he wrote dozens of poems in which he defended the victories of the Revolution. Without any thought of himself, he lavishly spent his creative genius for the advancement of the new ideals of socialism.



DAVID BURLIUK

drawn by Vladimir Mayakovsky

GOOD:

(Excerpts)

The better to rebuild ---
with the same hand
I could smash half
my fatherland.

Name me with
the builder, the weaver,
whom work raises
to joyous fever.

I praise
what the fatherland
is,
And thrice
what it will be.

Of the vast plan
and its creator
I am the loud
celebrator
with song, with pride,
like our will's
two meter
stride.

Into work
into battles
we march
and my song
is our
triumphal arch.
Under bare earth
under the compost heap,
meters below,
I see our communes
and their firm tissues
grow.

We omit now
to Nature
the bow;
We omit thanks
for her paltry
hanks;
the prayers that pay,
for the dull pood
of hay.
Toward tractors start
our peasantry's heart.

The hopes
once stalled
before poverty's
dead end;

On infinite
horizons
their energies
spend.

The crippled plans,
the dreams ingrown
now stand erect
in steel and stone.

And I
sing praise to my father-
land,
humanity's
early spring
born of struggle
and toil,
my republic,
to you,
I sing!

Over almost
this whole round earth
I've bounced;
that's my warrant
to announce:

Good living's
here,
it's good to live
here,
in the plunge
and risk
of creation.

In the cities
that star
the nation,
longer, brighter
the rays of streets;

Me
each winking
lamp globe greets.

The street
it's mine!
My houses
line it!
The windows smile
a happy mile.
The bulging shops
their luscious windows
push at me
like trays.
Here's glowing fruit
and glowing wine
and glowing days.

Inside
how neatly, cleanly
veils of tulle repulse
indecent flies.

Of those fresh cheeses
gleaming there,
edible amber
rich and fair,
now my ruble
brings me
more.

Cheerfully drop
the added slices.
The lamps headlight
"lower prices!"
Oh my plumed
cooperatives,
crowing
abundance!

Good health!
I am jubilant with you,
increasers of
my wealth.

I,
Moscow bookshops
cannot pass;
my swelling breast
near breaks the glass.
Whole ranks of books
march with my name,
proclaim
that the labor of
Mayakovsky,
poet
cogs with the labor - of
the republic!

Those thick-lipped tires
on my truck
carry my load;
they twirl,
they spout dust
on this, my road.

My deputies sit
in the red assem-
bly; not a sleeper
among them.

My red cheeked
militia man pats
his tan holster;
courage slung in his heart
still more's the
law's bolster;

It's me
he guards

day and night;
On more than street crossings
his traffic rules
set me aright.

"Good!"
I say:
He smiles my way
"Good!"
We salute:
"Good!"

Covering me
what tapestry!
Seamless,
infinite,
cordial to the eye,
the blue silk
vastness
of my sky!
In its great folds
my airmen play;
sunlights, moonlights
their wings inlay.
Peaks vaulted,
clouds lanced,
my hurraing airmen
speed their way.

I am stiff with pride,
I stand like a tree
with my arms
upspread.
Let war come; the world
at the deeds of my airmen
will wag
its head!

My eye strides far
into the daily paper.
I want to see
where else
the workers caper;
where else the workers
have their knee
in the small
of the back
of the
bourgeoisie;

The world's afire,
oh, how it rages;
a world big flame
rustles these pages.
A world's goods stalled
on their usual journeys;
a spasm
rocks a thousand
district attorneys.

Good,
 let their editors
 froth.
 Let them lie
 whole cloth.

 Fear's wild scream
 is in their throat;
 That pallid glitter
 is fear sweat;
 that plea
 the whimper of the ban-
 Soon, aye ished.
 on history's ear
 it all will die
 to the far faint
 echo of the
 vanished.

 My armies
 I review.
 Good!
 Keen trumpet,
 clean rifle,
 good shoe.

 You well built marchers,
 you bright of eye,
 firm footed,
 broad chested,
 heads held high!
 Now the artillery
 crashes by!

 Listen, red-starred man
 I, the red bardman,
 keep pace,
 see face
 with you!

 I'm
 in line.
 Your foes
 are mine!
 Do they edge in? Good.
 We know our orders!
 Like flying dust
 we'll send those
 who soil
 our borders!

 Smoke spuming train
 be watchful of
 our Soviet air.

 Breathe deep,
 my deep lunged factories -
 but take care!
 my swift pulsed machines

 is every wheel aw whirl?
 Don't stop. More cloth
 for our Komsomol girl!

 Wind-fanned
 I walk
 in my garden;
 Spring scented
 I walk
 the wood.

 Ah,
 how good!
 Past towns,
 the tillage,
 in the tillage
 the village;
 In the village
 is reared
 the peasant
 with the broom beard.

 Each dad
 on a box
 eyes fixed
 like a fox.
 Behind
 the ploughtines
 he breaks clods,
 he makes rhymes.

 In early
 burly
 labor
 He vies
 with his
 neighbor.

 So earth
 is sown
 and cows
 milked,
 and bread
 baked,
 and streams
 fished,
 and the world
 waked.

 Our republic
 builds itself
 so;
 so,
 sees itself
 grow.

 Other lands
 mumble
 funeral histories.

Out with
those coffin breaths;
superfluous
mysteries;
be done
with deaths!

Here is
young truth,
a history with
the fresh breath
of youth!

Creating
inventing
experiencing,
and joy in the action
overabundant,
brimming.

Hold out your hands
nations
for the overflow.

You follow our people
through time;
you will see
our centenarians
still lads,
still lasses,
will be.

Our energy
budding each year
like new branches,
new truth;

Hammer and poem,
praise
land of youth!

1927

Translated by Isidor Schneider
[Reprinted from "International Literature"]

AT THE TOP OF MY VOICE

Comrades of the future, our descendants!
Grubbing in the fossilized crap of the past,
probing the twilight of bygone centuries,
you,
it may be,
will ask who I was.
And perhaps your scholar,
whose erudition
the querying devil himself would have foiled,
will tell of a poet
of sanitation
who never let people drink water unboiled.

Professor,
off with your optical bicycles!
I alone will tell
about our times,
about myself.

I'm a scavenger and water-boy.

When Revolution called, I went to war
and left behind the lordly arbored walks
of Poesy;--the slippery whore.

Made herself a little garden--
roses,

posies,
all complete.

She herself has made the garden,

She herself will water it.

Some spout verse from garden hose,
others spurt it from the mouth--

wisely-cracking Comrade Sidetrax
gumption-lacking Comrade Wisecrux--
who the hell can make them out!
Sprinkle lysol, stop the stinkers--
out they pounce, the banjo gang:
"pinka-ponka, ponka-pinka,
pa-a-ng!"

Small honor to me

That from roses like this
My statues on high should rear
on squares where consumptives hawk and spit
with whores and hooligans
and gonorrhea.

I'm fed

to the teeth
with agitprop stuff

And I'd scribble you
poetry

gladly enough,
It's much more paying and pleasing.

But I've

subdued
myself;
by the scruff
of the neck my own song seizing.

Listen to me,

comrades of posterity--
an agitator,
trumpeter-in-chief!

Having drained

the rivulets of poetry,

I shall stride

over lyrical embroidery,
like a live man
speaking with the live.

I shall come to you

in the far-off communist to be,
not like the singsong Yesseninist minstrels.
My song shall come

over the ages' peaks
and over the heads
of poets and of princes.
My song shall come,
but not like those of yore,
not like a dart
from Cupid's lyrical quiver,
not as there come
to coin-collectors
kopeks rubbed and worn,
and not like gleam of stars that sink forever.

My verse
with toil
shall crash the ages' bars
and stand before you,
plain
and rough
and bold,
as Roman aqueducts come down the years,
erected by the toiling slaves of old.

In gravemounds of books,
where my verse lies entombed,
chancing to light upon the scraps of iron stanzas
you,
with awe's reverence,
will finger the exhumed
and feel an old but formidable weapon.

To caress the ear with words is not my wont.
The maiden's tiny ear,
in ringleted curls entwined,
at semi-obscurities
shall not redden in ecstasy.

Arraying in review
my pages' battle-line,
I stride along the ranks of poetry.
In heavy columns looms the metal verse,
ready alike for death
or fame throughout the ages.

Poems freeze stiff,
in close alignment pressed
the yawning muzzles of their title pages.
The favorite arm of all our fighting line,
wit's cavalry
wait tense and low,
raising the sharpened lances of their rhyme,
ready to burst in thunder on the foe.
And all of these battalions,
armed from head to feet
with twenty years of victories on their banner,
to the last syllable of the final sheet
I dedicate to you,
the workers of our planet.

The titan workingclass's hated foe
he's mine as well,
inveterate and utter.
What made us march beneath the Red flag so?
'Twas years of toil and days of gnawing hunger.
We opened Marx's every volume wide,
like men in their own house
who open wide the shutter,
but without reading too
we knew it signified
which side to fight
and which to muster under.

Our dialectics
we never learnt in Hegel's class.
In crashing din of war
it burst upon our ken,
at the bullet's hiss
the bourgeois ran from us,
as we
at one time
ran away from them.

At death of geniuses
disconsolate and wild,
let widowed glory trail in funeral weeds,
Perish, my verse! Die like the rank-and-file,
as died our nameless heroes.
on the barricades.
To hell, I say, with bronze's hulking tonnage,
to hell, I say, with marble's slimy sweat.
Me and my pals will settle up the damage--
the common cenotaph to do us homage,
shall be
the battle-structured
World Soviet.

Posterity,
Scan well your lexicon's floating bobs.
From Lethe's stream there rise
the remnants of such words
as "prostitute,"
"blockade,"
"tuberculosis."

For you,
whose every limb
with health and vigor throbs,
the poet has licked up consumption's spittle gobs
with the abrasive tongue of posters.

The years trail on,
and I shall soon resemble
an excavated monster,
tailed and hoary.
Good comrade life,
let's open up the throttle
in iron Pyatiletkas thunder out the story.

My poems haven't piled me up a penny.
No cabinet-makers came
 my rooms with truck to fill.
And I can say with all the truth that's in me
That, barring clean shirt, my wants are nil.

Standing before
 the Party center
 of future years,
 above a gang of poetry's
 money-hogs and crooks,

I'll raise aloft,
 as Bolsheviks raise their Party cards,
 all hundred volumes of my Bolshevik books.

1930

Translated by H.G. Scott
[Reprinted from "International Literature"]

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

(excerpts)

A Bolshevik	"pacifying"
in tears?	for the yen
Should a museum	fueled
put him	their locomotives
on display,	with our men.
what a house	To make sure
he'd draw!	we were sealed
Who ever saw	as dead
a Bolshevik	They served us
in tears!	drinks of
Mamontov's riders	boiling lead.
sewed us	"Curse Communism!"
in sacks,	these gentlemen
with branding irons	yelled
fissured	while the lead pot
our backs.	heated.
The Japanese	Two words

our last gasp
 formed,
 two words
 our dying lips
 repeated,
 "Live Communism!"

On January twenty-second
 this same
 human steel,
 this fire forged
 man iron
 met;
 in patient rows
 sat down,
 the great
 soviet.
 They finished off
 some routine
 bother,
 then sat there
 looking
 at each other.
 Chairlegs scrape,
 dig holes
 in the floor.
 It's time!
 It's time!
 They wait--
 What for?

Why
 are their eyes
 raw red
 like meat?

Why
 can't Kalinin
 stand straight
 on his feet?

Is he ill?
 What's up?
 Tell me!
 Tell me!

That?
 No.
 It cannot
 be!

A sudden
 night
 blackens
 the ceiling;

The bell's
 long
 unnecessary
 sound
 chokes on its
 pealing.
 The lamps
 lose their
 light,

and our faces
 their
 life.
 And lusters
 and shadows.
 Self mastered
 at last
 Kalinin
 stands straight,
 but his streaked face,
 wet mustache,
 limp beard
 and still weeping look
 betrayed
 a Bolshevik
 in tears.
 Grief grips
 his lean hands,
 Grief clots
 his breast,
 drives in his
 veins,--
 "Last night
 ten minutes
 to seven
 Comrade
 Lenin
 died!"

II

The stuff of centuries
 has crammed
 this year.
 This black bordered day
 will see many
 centennials.
 We heard iron
 cry;
 we saw grief
 strike sobs
 from the iron
 Bolsheviks.
 The steadfast,
 the strong,
 with hearts
 iron hooped,
 who'd faced
 death
 erect
 met
 this death,
 stooped.
 In its black drapes
 the Bolshoi
 Theater
 tossed
 on the square,

like a mammoth
 hearse.
 Joy was a snail,
 but misfortune
 a horse;
 galloping misfortune
 rode us
 down.
 The sun is blank;
 ice cannot
 glow.
 Sieved through black news
 this winter
 sheds
 black snow.
 In the brain
 of the man
 at the bench,
 the news
 rips
 like a
 bullet;
 and his stare
 spills slowly
 like tears
 on glass.
 A peasant never moved
 by the faces
 and gestures
 of death,
 tonight wiped his face
 and startled his wife
 with the mud
 his hand
 left on his
 cheek.
 The stone stolid,
 the grim,
 the impassive,
 tonight
 cracked their shells
 bit their lips
 wrung their hands.
 Tonight
 children were like sober
 old men,
 and sober
 old men
 wept like children.
 Like a steppe wind
 over our lives
 howls
 our bereavement;
 the stunned land
 cannot believe,
 cannot yet
 believe
 That Moscow
 is a mortuary,

that there lies
 the coffin
 of the revolution's
 son and father!

III

One thought welds worker,
 peasant,
 Red Army man.
 Lenin is gone.
 And hard now
 's the road
 of the republic
 without him!
 But panting
 on mattresses
 never
 will smooth it.
 Whom
 shall we set in his place
 and how
 find him?
 "A note,
 Comrade Secretary:
 Register tonight
 the collective enrollment
 of our whole plant
 in the Communist
 cell."
 The bourgeoisie
 stares;
 the bourgeoisie
 shivers.
 Straight from
 their benches,
 four hundred thousand
 themselves
 bequeath;
 four hundred thousand
 marching,
 twining
 Lenin's
 first Party
 wreath!
 "Listen,
 Comrade Secretary,
 enter this in the book ..
 We will replace ...
 We must
 replace ...
 If I'm too old
 here's my grandson
 for the Komsomol!"
 So Ilyich
 even in death
 remained
 our best

organizer.	living folds
A million arms,	once more
a sudden forest;	Lenin
the forest	living
waves.	speaks:
Red Square becomes	"Draw up
a living	proletarians
red flag.	for the final clash;
The line of march	slaves stiffen
is its living staff.	your backs,
From the immense	straighten
	your knees!"

1924

Translated by Isidor Schneider
 [Reprinted from "International Literature"]

TALE OF THE KUZNETSKY CONSTRUCTION

"In the Five Year Plan a million railroad cars of building material shall be brought here. Here shall stand a giant of metallurgy, a giant of coal, a city of hundreds of thousands." (An overheard conversation.)

Rain	A sewer darkness
weights	is this night,
the dusk;	And thick as braids
clouds	the cords
crowd	of rain
the sky;	are knit.
an old cart	
under,	In laps of mud
some workers	shivering
lie.	the workers
Toward splashing water	sit.
above	
below	The splinters they burn,
defiant whispers	die
spurting	yielding their spark;
go;	but --
"Our wheelruts	"In four years, here
mark,	shall stand
where in four years	a park!"
shall stand	
our park."	That whisper
	from lips

swollen and blue
with cold
foretells the hands
that here
take hold.

Everything wet,
everything fouled,
muddy raindrip
overhead
they chew
their hunks
of soggy bread.

Stronger than hunger
they outstare
the dark;
hoarser than rain
they whisper
"here shall stand
city and park!"

From this
his last
estate
the bear
shall
emigrate.

Striding
dynamite,
explosions
at each step,

Shall make
stone
pliant;

a shaft
shall pierce
the earth,
a huge
coal giant.

Here
walls shall rise
and factory sirens
sing.

To this
bare land
we'll bring

new suns
to warm
Siberia

a hundred

open hearth
furnaces.

Here we shall have
each
a good house

eat
good bread
and cheap

white
and unrationed,

here
we shall root
deep;

from our windows
all good land
to see.

The Taiga
retreating
beyond Baikal
shall flee.

Strong
vaulting whispers
stampeding
the clouds,
slashing the dimness
like strips of bark,

"Here shall stand
a city park!"

And this
is certainty enough
for me.

Here,
I know,
a town
shall be!

A park
shall bloom!

With such men
on Soviet 'land
such futures
have room.

Translated by
Isidor Schneider

BROTHER WRITERS

It seems, I shall never grow accustomed
to sitting in the "Bristol,"
drinking tea,
lying by the line, --
I shall upset the glasses,
clamber on the table
"Listen,
literary brothers!
You sit,
eyes drowning in tea,
your velvet elbows worn with scribbling,
Raise your eyes from the unemptied glasses!
Disentangle your ears from those shaggy locks!
Darlings,
what wedded you to words,
you who sit glued
to walls
and wall-paper?
Do you know
that Francois Villon,
when he finished writing,
did his job of plundering?
And you,
who quake at the sight of a penknife,
boast yourselves guardians of a splendid age.
What have you to write about to-day?
Any solicitor's assistant finds
life
a hundred times more interesting.
Gentlemen poets,
have you not tired
of pages,
palaces,
love
and lilac blooms?
If such as you
are the creators,
then I spit upon all art.
I'd rather open a shop,
or go on the Stock Exchange
and bulge my sides with fat wallets.
In a tavern rear
I'll spew up my soul
in a drunken song.
Will the blow tell,
cleave through your sheaves of hair?
But you've only one idea
under that mop of hair:
to comb! And why?
For a while, it's not worth the labour
and to be eternally
combed
is impossible."

Translated by
George Reavey & Marc Slonim
1918
[Reprinted from "Soviet Literature: an anthology" by
George Reavey & Marc Slonim]

MIRACLES

Like the tap
whence had flowed
the bath of light
the moon
toward the flooded palace
bent,
and outward
shone on the sea,--
light,
the more liquid
element.

Tonight
the moon's face has
a special stare,
its old eyes
seeing
something rare,
a poster
straddling
Livadia's
wall.
"Comrade Mayakovsky reads.
Come one,
come all!"

Here,
where the tsar
relaxed
with guests
of high birth,
where billowing ladies
minced
and neighed
their high-toned
mirth,

I
strong peasants
shall warm
With a lecture
on content
and form!

Bell rings

Leaving the moon
and night
I go in,
a platform
ascend
and begin.

Facing me
Russian plain
and steppeland
sit;

scratch big beards;
and in blonde hair
strong fingers
knit;

faces glisten
like wiped saucers;
they all knew
where to laugh,
where to ponder.

Let those
who prize
the Soviets
share with me
this wonder;
get drunk
with me
on happiness.

Where else
are palaces
fit to be
halls
where peasants hear
poetry?

Elsewhere
the very thought
brings laughter;
here our thought is
what new wonder
will come after!

Exiting
among my clients;
I walk behind
two peasant
giants

keeping
near them
when they stop,
and opinions
start to swap.

"Mishka"
says one

voice quite
merry
"That
last line
was good!"

Then for a stroll
through this
moonlit Arcadia
went these new lords
of the tsar's
Livadia.

"Oh, very."

Translated by Isidor Schneider

LOST IN CONFERENCE

I paint this mural of a Moscow dawn.
The meeting-magnetized, see them drawn
to the Gen --
Com--
Polit--
Educat--.
Into offices they swarm.
Follow at your risk,
a paper shower you'll be caught in.
You come to interview
a mere fifty-one or two:
the most important.
Every desk
empty, everyone fleeting
to a meeting.
You stop one:
"Comrade, a moment,"
you implore,
"Ivan Ivanich, where? I've tried
to reach him since antiquity.
Till I see him I won't stir."
"Ivan Ivanich had to confer
with the United Bureau of A and B."

You pant up the hundredth stair
wan with climbing and despair.
Again you hear
"in an hour, meanwhile
why not enjoy the fresh air?
They're at a conference
negotiating the purchase --
important, can't stop --
of a bottle of ink
from the Region Co-op."

An hour passes
You walk into vacancy.
No clerks in sight,

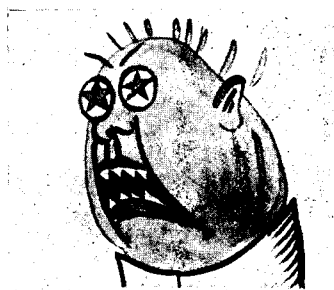
no lads, no lasses
to give you a greeting,
even to hand you another stall.
Then you see the poster on the wall:
"Under twenty-two years, all
To the Komsomol meeting."

I learn where Ivan Ivanich is.
Into the room I burst, possess,
wild curses spattering
from my breast,
eyes dilating.
What's this?
Halves of men lolling!
Torsos debating!
Stiff stands my hair.
The other halves, where?

The secretary's cool
official voice
halts me retreating
"We're here -- and we're there
at a second meeting.
We had no choice.
How simultaneously
hold two meetings?
The problem's solved.
Ourselves we halved;
torsos here,
the rest
there."

Those half men meetings keep
my night from sleep.
But with a soothing dream
I meet the sun.
One more conference
one last conference,
one
to liquidate all conferences!

Translated by Isidor Schneider
[Reprinted from "International Literature"]



7. КАК БЫ К ЧЕРТЯМ
НЕ ПРОСЫПАЛИСЬ Б ОБА,

A MOST EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE

Which happened to Me, Vladimir Mayakovsky, at the Rumyantzev Summerhouse, Mount Akula, Pushkino, on the Yaroslav Railway.

The sunset fired a hundred suns,
Summer had rolled into July,
heat stretched and purred,
heat hugged the sky--
and it was in the country this occurred.
The hill, called Mount Akula, hunched it's back
and lifted high
Pushkino's huts and winding streets.
The bark roofs of the village warped
the hill, and bowed with heat.
Now, off beyond the village lay
a yawning hole,
and every day
the sun dropped down into that hole,
and slowly and most certainly
upon the morrow its bright head
would pop out of that hole
as red
as ever, in the self-same way.
And this thing happened every day.
So I got sore,
yes, I was vexed.
It maddened me always to know
just what would happen next.
And once, thoroughly sick of it,
I shouted in the sun's red face:
"Climb down!
Forget your lousy pit!"
I cried, like that, right at the sun:
"You good-for-nothing! You've a cushioned place
up in the clouds, and here I sit,
not knowing if it's Spring or Fall,
drawing posters, and that's all!"
I yelled up to the sun:
"You wait!
Listen to me, you brazen-eyed,
instead of setting as you do,
why don't you come around", I cried,
"and have a glass of tea
with me?"
What have I done!
Now I am lost!
Here comes the sun,
with sprawling rays out-thrust,
clambering down across the field to me.
Pretending I'm not scared,
I beat retreat.
His eyes are in the garden now.
He's tramping through the garden now,
Filling
the windows,
filling

doors and cracks,
 the burly sun walked in,
 just so -- dropped in,
 and having got his breath,
 spoke in a bass voice with a brazen din:
 "I have to hold my fires in check
 the first time since creation.
 You invited me?!
 Then, poet, get the tea!
 And don't forget the jam."
 And though I wept with heat and dripped
 a flood of perspiration,
 I got the samovar.
 "Well, have a seat,
 friend luminary."
 It must have been the devil made me shout
 my impudences at the sun.
 I was put out,--
 and sat on the chair's edge:
 afraid of what was going to happen next.
 But from the sun
 a strange light flowed --
 he didn't seem so vexed --
 and I, forgetting my embarrassment,
 no longer scary,
 sat --
 talking to the luminary!
 I chat
 of this
 and that,
 and soon,
 with open friendship
 pat him on the back.
 And the sun
 says, -- not to be outdone:
 "Well, comrade, I declare,
 we are a pair!
 Let's go!
 Poet, let's sing,
 and shout to scare
 the drabness of the world.
 I'll pour out light,
 you'll do no worse
 in pouring forth your verse."
 Then the sun loosed his shot, --
 shattered night's shadows,
 banished the black lot.
 Rays and words,
 shine for all you're worth!
 And when the sun gets tired,
 and night the stupid sleepy-head,
 wants to doze off,
 suddenly I am fired
 with zeal, and shine for all I'm worth --
 and day roars out again.
 Always to light,
 and everywhere to light,
 and, to the very last,
 to light, --

thus runs
my motto,
and the sun's!

Translated by B. Deutsch & A. Yarmolinsky
[Reprinted from "Russian Poetry: an anthology" by
permission of International Publishers, authorized
publishers]

GOOD AND BAD

Came a little son
to dad,
These big questions
asked the lad:
"What is good,
and what is bad?"

I'm not the sort
who keeps things secret--
look,

here's dad's
answer
in my book:
If a wind
blows off a roof
lets in rain
lets in snow,
that is bad,
everyone knows.

Wind drops,
snow stops.
Sunshine
all over
on grownups
in fields,
on kids
in the wood,--
for grownups
and kids
that's
very good.

Smeary-face
has dirt to his chin;
sores will teach him
that's bad

for the skin.

Clean face
isn't
scared of soap,
brushes his teeth
as everyone
should.

Everyone calls
that boy
good.

A bully is beating
a smaller kid--
don't
look
I don't want him
in my
book.

But that other 'one
who cries
"Why don't you pick
a kid
your size,"--

I suppose
it's understood
He can have pages
here;
he's good.

Young October
Magazine
prints
that it
is very mad

at toy-losers,
toy-abusers,
rates them all
as
very
bad.

But the boy
who
after his fun
sings
as he gets
his homework
done
minds his things
like a first-class
scout
him
we gladly
write about.

Scared by a pigeon
a boy ran
bawling.
Poor little coward.
Out of my book
he goes
sprawling.
Cowardice,
lad,--
that's
bad.

But that one -
there--
whom
the birds
don't scare

though he's only
bigger
an inch
I'd say,
that good lad
in my book
can stay.

This little visitor
walks in the mud,
gets himself black

like the mouth
of an oven --

No one
goes near him;
who likes
a sloven?

Yes,
lad,
he's
bad.

But this one
who's neat
who uses
the brushes;
and on paying
a visit
takes off
his
galoshes,

no matter
how tiny,
this neat
lad and
shiny,

way up
he'll be stood,
as the boy
who is good.

Little piggies
into big pigs
grow --

neatness
in childhood
in grownups
show.
When he heard
these answers
the little son
said,

"Now I know,
dad;
I'll be good,
not bad."

Translated by Isidor Schneider

HANDS OFF CHINA!

(Agitverse)

War,
 daughter of imperialism,
stalks,
a spectre through the world.
Workers, roar: Hands off China! --
Hey, Macdonald,
 don't meddle
in leagues and muddle speeches.
Back, dreadnoughts!
Hands off China! --
In the embassy quarters
 kings meticulously
sit, weaving a web of intrigues.
We'll brush away the cobweb.
Hands off China! --
Coolie,
 enough of dragging them, cool, in rickshaws,
straighten your back.
Hands off China!
They want to pulverize
 you
 with a colony.
400 millions,
 you're no drove.
Louder, Chinese: Hands off China! --
Time you drove
 these drivers out,
dropping them off the wall of China.
Pirates of the world,
Hands off China! --
We're glad
 to help
 all enslaved
to fight,
 teaching
 and providing.
We're with you, Chinamen!
Hands off China!
Workers,
 rout the robber
night, fire as a rocket
your fiery slogan:
Hands off China!

1927

Translated by George Reavey & Marc Slonim
[Reprinted from "Soviet Literature: an anthology" by
George Reavey & Marc Slonim by permission of Covici-
Friede, Inc., authorized publishers.]

THE BEST POEM

Dear
 respectful
 audience,
delirious
 with literary
 fever

you pant
 in my face
 dropping memories
 like a retriever--

"Read Comrade
 Mayakovsky
 the best
 of your
 poems."

To which
 shall I throw
 the election?

Choice is hard--
 choosing
 is also rejection!

I lean
 on the chair arm and
 set for the test
spread out
 in my mind
 like a table
the sheets
 of my
 verses.

Which
 is the
 best?

While I shuffle
 among them
and the
 hushed audience
 waits;

the editor
 of the Northern Worker
 tiptoes
 beside me

And in
 thrilled whispers
 relates....

How I roared
 spattering

the poetic
 hush!

Noisier
 than
 the Jericho
 crush!

"Comrades!"
 I cry,
"The Cantonese
 workers
have taken
 Shanghai!"

As if
 they were rumpling
tin sheets
 in their palms,
their shrilling
 applause
through the big hall
 storms.

Five minutes
 ten minutes,
 fifteen,
 and so on

Yaroslavl
 applauded
 Canton.

I heard
 our sharp
 Yaroslavl storm
 blowing
wide
 over Asia
 through India
 going....

To Chamberlain's
 notes
 our red
 reply
slapped
 in his face
 in new Shanghai
in whose harbor
 at Canton's sound
the dreadnoughts
 turn
their steel mugs
 around.

No, Yaroslavl,
no shuffling
through pages
no further test.
You've chosen
the best.

Where
is
comparable
strength
alive

to the

solidarity
in the workers'
hive!

Clap
Yaroslavl,
clap
dairymen
clap
waiters
Cheer on
the Chinese coolies!
your brother
liberators.

Translated by Isidor Schneider

'LEFT MARCH'

(To Sailors)

Rally the ranks into a march!
Now's no time to quibble or browse,
Silence, you orators!
You
have the floor,
Comrade Mauser.
Enough of living by laws
that Adam and Eve have left.
Hustle old history's horse.
LEFT!
LEFT!
LEFT!

Ahoy, blue jackets!
Cleave skywards!
Beyond the oceans!
Unless
your battleships on the roads
blunted their keels' fighting keenness!
Baring the teeth of his crown,
let the lion of Britain whine, gale-heft.
The Commune can never go down.
LEFT!
LEFT!
LEFT!

There
beyond sorrow's seas

sunlit lands uncharted.
Beyond hunger,
beyond plague's dark peaks,
marching of millions' imprint!
Let armies of hirelings ambush us,
streaming cold steel through every rift,
L'Entente can't conquer the Russias.
LEFT!
LEFT!
LEFT!

Does the eye of the eagle fade?
Shall we stare back to the old?
Proletarian fingers
grip tighter
the throat of the world!
Chests out! Shoulders straight!
Stick to the sky red flags adrift!
Who's marching there with the right?
LEFT!
LEFT!
LEFT!

1918

Translated by Bert Marshall
[Reprinted from "Left Review"]

DECREE TO THE ARMY OF ART

They brag, the old men's brigades,
Of the same old wearisome goals.
Comrades,
To the barricades!
Barricades of hearts and souls.
He alone is a Communist true
Who burns the bridge for retreat,
Stop marching slowly, Futurists,
Into the future --- leap!
Engines are easy to build,
Wind the wheels and they go ---
But hurl your song like a bomb,
There's a railway depot to blow!
Pile up sound on sound,
March on
With whistle and song;
Loud ringing letters abound
To roll
Under
Your tongue.
Pants creased like a feather's edge ---
That's the easy officer's way;
All the soviets won't budge the troops

Unless the musicians play.
Drag pianos into the street,
Let drums rend the air asunder,
Whether drums or pianos beat,
Let tumult be,
Let thunder!
What good to slave in a shop,
To soil your face and growl,
Why stare at the joy
Of others,
Flapping your eyes like an owl?
Enough of pennywise talk ---
Wipe the old from the heart who dares!
The streets shall be our brushes,
Our palettes shall be the squares.
The thousand-paged Book of Time
Revolution's songs shall know:
Into the streets, Futurists,
Drummers and poets, go!

Translated by Joseph Freeman and Leon Talmy
[Reprinted from "The Nation"]

OUR MARCH

Beat on the street the march of rebellion,
Sweeping over the heads of the proud;
We, the flood of a second deluge,
Shall wash the world like a bursting cloud.

Days are a bright steed;
Years drag glum;
Our great god is-----Speed!
Our heart a bellowing drum!

What is richer than our colors?
Can we be caught by the bullet's sting?
For rifles and bayonets we have ballads;
Our gold is our voices' ring!

Green meadows grow,
Days burst by-----
Rainbow, curve your bow!
Hurrying horses, fly!

See the stars in heaven above us.
Our songs without their help will thrive:
Eh, the Great Bear is demanding
We be lifted to heaven alive!

Sing Drink sweet!
Our veins flow Spring!
Beat, heart, beat!
Breast of brass, ring!

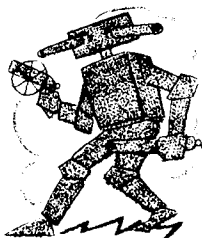
Translated by Joseph Freeman and Leon Talmy
[Reprinted from "The Nation"]

MAN AND SHIP

forever in its wake.

bright and bloody
from corridor combats,
Communism from books
is easy belief.
(To serve it up
in books
is fashionable.)
But this -
brings 'rigmarole' to life,
and shows
communism
in flesh and blood.
We live,
firm-clenched
in an iron oath.
For that -
we're crucified
and bullets flee:
that the world shall be
one human commonwealth,
without any Russia,
without any Latvia.
Blood runs in our veins
not water pallid.
We march on,
through revolver barks,
that
dying,
we shall be embodied
in ships,
in poems,
and other long-lived works,
I want to live and live,
through the years whirl fleet,
But at the end I want -
no other wish lives yet -
My hour of death
I want to meet
as death was met
by Comrade Theodore Nette.

Translated by - Bert Marshall



5. ОТТОГО ЧТО
НА УКРАИНЕ
ВОЙНА.

SOVIET PASSPORT

Bureaucracy
 like a wolf
 I'd gnaw;
for stamped papers
 I have no awe;
to any devil's dam
 and her
 son
I'd consign them all--
 but one

Before
 the suites
 and cabin grooves,
from dim hands
 passports
 shine.
Impeccably
 the suave inspector
 moves --
I hand him mine.
At these he stares
 with bored
 indifference;
at those
 smiles loop his lips
 like Dion's.
For instance
 note his
 reverence
for the engraved
 British
 lion.
Magnetized
 eyes
and a murmuring
 lip
for the American's passport
 official hands
 rise
as if taking
 a tip,
The Pole's passport
 they handle
 with insolent paws
Bullish disdain
 On their
 bullish jaws.
They goggle at it
 like a goat
 at the views,--

What if they choose
to ignore
 its geographical
 news?

Not an inch
 veer their skulls
 for such.
With the unblinking
 nonchalance
 of shore dicks
the passports
 they take
 of the Dutch
and other
 minor
 Nordics.

Suddenly
 you'd think fire
 had caught
 the man's mouth;
it twists
 like scorched paper.
This dignity
 aper
reaches a
 shuddering
 white hand
 out
for my good
 ruddy
 passport,
which for officials
 and that sort
now, see,
 has become
a hedgehog,
 a bomb,
a twenty fanged
 snake,
an Asian
 earthquake!
A wise wink
 creases
 the porter's eye.
Your baggage
 you know
 he'll haul free.
The cop turns a
 querying
 wink to the dicks,
back to the cop
 the query
 flicks.
O how they'd love
 to see me
 bleed,
slugged
 crucified
 and third-degreed,

for having in hand
that challenging
massword
my hammered and sickled
Soviet
passport!

Bureaucracy
like a wolf
I'd gnaw;
for stamped papers
I have no awe;
to any devil's dam
and her
son

I'd consign them all--
but one
which I pull
from my pants
as receipt
for a priceless
treasure;
and greet
with it all mankind.
Read,
envy me
elect of men!
I am
a Soviet
citizen!

Translated by Isidor Schneider
[Reprinted from "International Literature"]

LA PARISIENNE

You think
La Parisienne
is pretty grand,
gorgeously gesturing
with a
gemmed hand;
proud head tossing
on a pearled
neck,
and one-two-three
dandies
at her
beck.

Sorry
boys,
truth's
stricture
calls on me
to change
the picture.

Look,
men,
Here's
my Parisienne!

Is she old?
is she young?
this poor drab

hung
to the top
of a mop
and stuck
in a den.
Here
you see
la Parisienne.

She's housekeeper
and guardian haunt
in the privy of
a restaurant.

There come to disgorge
those who follow
too big a bite
with too deep a swallow.

And here's
mademoiselle
to ease
their spell.

Deft
with towel
and steering hand--
done
with an artist's
nice command.

The perfect
pose, she's
mute and
simple--

while you
at a mirror
peck at a
pimple

attention
cozing
from her smile
and powder
flying
from her fingers

on to your cheek.
Meanwhile
with "the scent
that lingers."

Then out
you heave;
and she
mops the puddle
that you leave.

Let me
again
apostrophize my
Parisienne.

There she stands
with soap
and towel,
gluttony's drudge
in his public
bowel.

Serving
through dayless
stretches of day

sun
unseen
and stars
away

for an income
figured
at two cents per
swilling and spilling
customer.

Over the washstand
soaping away
Right through the perfume
I want to say:
"Mademoiselle
in a way

you're swell
but all my romantic
notions
you spoil.

Your appearance
is hardly
according to Hoyle.

To grow old
in a privy
is some career
for an actual
life-size
Paris
dear,

Either
what all
they said was
baloney

Or,
mademoiselle,
you're a poor
little
phony.

Your cheek
is genuine
consumption
white,

not silk
your stockings
or gay
your night.

The gents
with the bankrolls
who visit
these bowers
don't stop
to dally,
don't send
you flowers."

No answer gets
my unsaid
question
from this
servant
of digestion.

All we hear
is heedless
din
from the dining room
leaking

in.
Out in the street
in a
carnival Mass
jitters
the desperate
Montparnasse.

Pardon,
my readers,
these gnashing
verses,
where you hear
echoes
of my curses.

Pardon
the puddle,
the ill-waked
dream,

You see
I took Paris
for my theme!

But Paris is hard
is sly
and unliving

To women
unsold
who work
for a living.

Translated by Isidor Schneider

BLACK AND WHITE

A glimpse
at Havana
bright from the windows --
A sunland
under the palms stand
red shadows,
the one legged flamingoes;
and bloom
collarios
In high toned
Vedado.
Of frontiers
Havana
no lack;
Dollars bound the white man,
bare pockets the black.
And so
Willie stands flush
with his brush
before Henry Clay
& Co.
Enough splinters
and fluff
to stock a dead forest
Has black Willie brushed
his lean living
to win.
That's why Willie's hair
off has been harassed
And his belly
brushed in.

Dreams dwarf in cramped beds --
 thin phantoms of joy --
 Sometimes a thief
 or a wharf gang chief
 throws a cent
 to the "boy."
 No escape from the dirt shoveling shoe.
 if only
 man walked
 on his head?--
 All the worse!
 More dirt
 would be spread.
 Hairs are a thousand,
 feet only two.
 Sparkles
 and sputters
 a three mile jazz.
 Straight and ahead
 slick boulevards spin.
 "Ah here," his mind
 the dim thought
 has,
 the veritable
 Eden
 must have been.
 No subtleties coil
 in Willie's
 brain,
 where little was sown
 and little grown;
 but one thing's cut
 far in
 by pain --
 (Not deeper
 the words indent
 the stone of Maseo's
 monument)
 "White man eats fruit
 that's ripe
 and firm;
 black man
 shares his
 with the worm.
 In fair hands
 fair work
 parks;
 on dark hands
 falls the dark."
 No great queries worried Willie
 but one question
 had him stumped.
 How that question
 drilled through Willie!--
 When it stuck him,
 willy-nilly,
 from his arm
 the big brush
 slumped.

Too bad that
 just then
 heaved his way
 toward the King of Cigars
 Henry Clay,
 in pluperfect whiteness
 and big jowl wag,
 his royal
 sugar highness
 Mr. Bragg.
 Up to the fat one
 runs the
 'nigger':
 "Beg yo' pardon
 Mr. Bragg,
 Aint it funny
 yo' lily white
 sugar
 Black man makes and puts it in the bag.
 With yo' white color
 black cigar's sho'
 out o' place;
 goes lots better
 on the black man's
 face.
 Sugar in yo' coffee?--
 Help yo'self,
 help;
 Be so kind, sir
 make it
 yo'self."
 To flaming yellow
 suddenly
 the royal whiteness burns.
 Here such a question
 never goes.
 The king does what
 each white lord
 learns;
 then from his hands
 his soiled gloves
 throws.
 Shaky Willie wipes his hand
 across his drawers
 across his stern.
 Broad red smears
 he leaves there from
 his bloody nose.
 Painful sniffs he draws up with
 his injured organ.
 Don't ask no questions
 of a
 gorgon.
 One hand on his brush
 Willy
 presses,
 the other to
 his bruised cheek
 goes.

That such questions
one addresses
To Comintern,
Moscow,
how should Willie
know?

1925

Translated by Isidor Schneider
[Reprinted from "International Literature"]

P A R I S

(A little chat with the Eiffel Tower)

By thousands of tyres outworn.
By millions of feet out-trod.
I furrow Paris -
so terribly alone,
its terrible - not a soul,
terrible - nobody.
Around me -
autos fantasize a dance,
around me -
whistling water, fountain-poured
from beastfish snouts -
still left from Louis Quinze,
I enter
La Place de la Concorde.
I wait,
till upraising its fretted peak,
tired from the trailing houses eyeing,
coming to meet me -
a bolshevik -
Eiffel rears from the clouds defiant.
S-s-s-sh..,
tower,
stalk quietly :
That moon's guillotine leer.
(I lowered to a whisper)
listen to me
(an murmured
buzzzzz
in her
radio-ear.)
I've agitated all things made and built.
We only want to know -
if you are agreed,
tower -
do you want to head a revolt?
Tower -
if so
we elect you to lead:

It's not for you -
model genius of machines -
here
to pine away from apollinairic verse.
No place
for you -
this place of degradations.
This Paris of prostitutes,
poets,
bourse.
The Metro's agreed,
the Metro's with us -
they'll spit out
from riveted tunnels
the crowd -
and wipe and scour
from their walls
with blood
placards-de-luxe of perfumes and powders.
They're convinced -
why should they stream and clatter
with first-class cars for the rich.
They're not rabble:
they're convinced:
our ads
suit them better,
simple posters
and placards of struggle.
Tower -
don't fear the streets:
Or else
if the streets won't release the Metro-
the road-beds are welded by rails.
I'll raise up the rails to revolt.
You're afraid?
Tractors in flocks will defend you.
Still afraid?
To our aid will come Rive-Gauche.
Don't be afraid:
I'll persuade the bridges too.
It's not so easy
to swim across:
The bridges,
maddened by the traffic hell,
will rise from the river banks of Paris
At the very first call
all bridges will rebel -
and dash passers-by on their buttressed piers.
Everything uprears.
Things are beyond endurance.
In fifteen
maybe twenty years,
strength dissolves,
steel flabbies,
and one of these nights
things
will go
to Montmartre
and sell themselves.

Come, tower,
 to us:
 There -
 you're more needed.
 Steel-shining,
 smoke-piercing,
 we'll meet you.
 Come to us.
 You'll be more tenderly greeted
 than our first love of loves.
 Come to Moscow:
 Moscow
 is spacious.
 Everyone
 will have you in their street.
 Everyone
 will cherish you:
 A hundred times a day or so
 we'll clean your steel and copper like the sun.
 Let that city of yours,
 Paris of dandies and dudes,
 Paris of yap-yawning boulevards,
 let it end the same, in old Boulogne woods,
 and museums, an all-in cemetery Louvre.
 March forward
 those four mighty paws endowed
 and clamped by the blue-prints of Eiffel,
 in our broad sky let your tall brow be radioed,
 that even our red stars will get an eyeful:
 Decide, tower -
 all around you revolts are
 shattering from head to foot old Paris:
 Come to us:
 to US, to the USSR:
 Come on. Let's go -
 I'll
 get you a visa.

1922-1923

Translated by Bert Marshall



THE TALE OF HOW PARFEN LEARNED OF THE LAW PROTECTING
THE WORKINGMEN

Parfen had fought on every front
And helped the Commune as a soldier can.
He shed whole bucketfuls of blood.
And now he's home again, a workingman.
He looked at Moscow, and at all the folk.
And then he scratched his nape and spoke:
"I've got to earn my bread," says he,
"But here is Nep, -- what will become of me?
So once more I'll have to stand, in the office, hat in
hand
And then the owner, he will hire another man instead of
me.
Oh, damn it all to hell,
The goose hangs high -- and all I get's the smell!"
Prov cut him short: "Come, that's enough.
Why are you handling out such stuff?
Today we manage things another way;
You can't just hire whoever takes your fancy, and
then fire.
No one can pick workmen out of the air,
And brandish the big stick.
They've got to go up to the Labor Bureau and get
them there."
"Don't tell me!" growled Parfen.
And Prov again scratches his pate and grins:
This isn't like old times, the workman wins
The game today: it's not the master hires and fires
now,
But to the Bureau the cur has got to bow."

Translated by B. Deutsch & A. Yarmolinsky
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9. ЧТОБ ПОРГОВАТЬ ГОД.



10. КРЕСТЬЯНИН УЧАЛЫВА-
ЕТ ЛИШЬ ПРОДАВАЮТ.



11. ПОПУТЫЕ И ОРИЕНТИРАЦИЯ С
РАСШИРЯЮЩИМИСЯ ПРАВДАМИ



12. МОЖЕТ ВСЕ ПОКУПАТЬ-
СЯ ВАМИ
ГЛАВНОЕ ПРОСЧЕТАТЬ. №145

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